

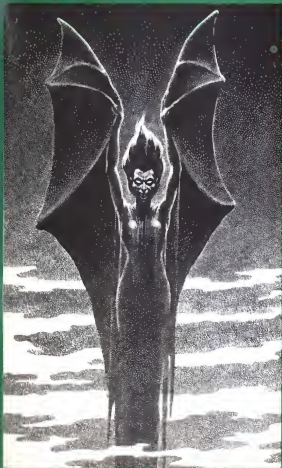


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**A SENSE OF
CRAWLING**

by

ROBERT EDMOND ALTER

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The Bizarre and The Unusual

3

A Sense Of Crawling

by Robert Edmond Alter

ROBERT EDMOND ALTER died at the age of 40, when pneumonia entered into the complications of amputation surgery for cancer, on the very day that his agent, *Larry Sternig* wired him that Boy's Life and Ancosy had accepted a story each, that Avon would publish his novel, *The Red Feather*, and that Putnam wanted his 14th boys' book, *First Comes Courage*. Alter never saw the telegram. He had been a fruit picker, a motion picture extra, and a postman; and there were years of preparation before he became a professional writer. He crossed the line in 1957, when his living was obtained as a mailman (an occupation which gave him ample time to work out fiction in his mind); the year before, 1956, he had written one story a week, every week, without exception. One thinks of the advice that Alexander Dumas gave a young hopeful: If you want to become a writer, you must write — write, write, write, every day, at a set time for a set length of time. Write whether you feel like writing or not, whether what you write is any good or not. The implication was that if you have the talent there, this sort of discipline will fertilize it. Of course, one needs to study and analyze the best published examples of the sort of writing one desires to accomplish — otherwise, practice can well become achieving perfection in errors — but that does not in any way negate Dumas's advice. You may have heard of the young fellow he was speaking to at the time: Jules Verne.

NILS AWOKE to sweat, neck-ache, and an acid taste in his mouth. It was damn well stifling in the crowded little cabin. Gee-

sus! If there was one thing he hated it was that first fuzzy five minutes after awaking from an afternoon nap.

He swung his feet down to the deck and sat there on the edge of the sweat-damp bunk and the only thought in his blurred brain was: What would be the quickest, most painless way to commit suicide?

He shook his absurd mood and stood up, wondering why he sensed an awareness of something gone wrong. Then his ears told him what it was: The engine in the scuffy old 30-ft motor yacht was acting like a cranky child.

Swell, he thought. A perishing breakdown. We need it like a third leg. He stumbled up the steps and into the deckhouse. Sordo, the native boatboy, grinned at him from the stool and shook his head. Paul, Nils's partner, was standing in the cockpit with the hatch open. He was frowning down at the motor.

"You know anything about these damn things?" he asked, looking up.

"No. What's wrong?"

"How in hell do I know?" Paul snapped. "Been acting up for the last mile, but don't ask me why. You want to know about taxonomy or systematic botany and I'll give you chapter and verse clear back to when Judas was a gardener. But motors, no." He went by Nils and entered the deckhouse to make sign-lingo with Sordo.

Nils sat down on the starboard bench and scowled at the

steaming jungle. The river was sluggish and liana-hung, web-roofed with the crowding eta palms and the mora and manicole trees, decorated with crimson sheets of creeper-flowers draped in chain-like garlands from one treetop to another, floored with spiky yellow yawaridans, flaming orchids and orange-blooming iteballis.

It was all a part of their profession. He and Paul were fieldmen for the Institute of Morphology in the States; they had just finished a two-month hitch back in the Brazilian bush, and now they were on their way home.

Sordo turned the boat into a sequestered setback in the bank. It was a humid place with strung bush-ropes supporting a filigreed canopy of rosy racemes. Paul came aft shrugging stoically.

"He doesn't know what's wrong; he'll have to pull the damn thing apart piece by piece. We'll be stuck here for hours. Well . . ." He rubbed his hands together with a show of energy. "Gimme a hand shipping the dory, huh? Think I'll see what form of aquatic phycology the river has to offer."

Which left Nils to supervise the repairs. The trouble was, Nils was just like Paul; mechanical contraptions left him in a state of abject bewilderment. He had no idea what was wrong or how long it would take to rectify the trouble. And trying to

communicate with Sordo was like holding a discussion with a brick wall. The Indian was well named; he was stone deaf.

ONE, TWO, THREE time-heavy hours dragged by, and Nils couldn't see that Sordo — now with various mysterious motor parts on an oily tarp spread on the porous bank alongside the idle boat — had accomplished a thing. He paced the bank irritably, up and down, up and down.

An almost inaudible noise pestered his inner ear. It was intangible: couldn't place it. Been hearing it for some time though

... A sudden commotion started overhead. Gaudy toucans and vivid green-and-orange parrots and crimson-yellow macaws were flitting nervously through the aerial growth, all heading west for some reason. Howler monkeys and a weasel-like tayra, too.

Again Nils was aware of the distant sound — an intangible crackling, as if thousands of balls of cellophane were being crumpled. He looked at Sordo, hunkering happily over his motor parts; but Sordo was, of course, totally oblivious to the enigmatic noise.

Nils looked at his wristwatch; he wished that Sordo would hurry up and that Paul would return. A gang of saki monkeys fled through the high parasitic

vegetation, chattering excitedly about something. The crackling sound seemed more intensified.

Curiosity got the best of him. Nils started into the bush, threading himself through a maze of phyllodendron roots which let straight down from the high branches like wire plumb-lines. Hummingbirds flashed by in a glittering blur of ruby, blue and silver; then a philander opossum and a small quica scooted through the shrubbery and were gone. They passed within yards of Nils without looking at him. Going west, always west.

He stopped in consternation. The jungle wall of moras, kuru-ballis and baramallis seemed to be out of focus, like an old-fashioned movie. It was actually aquiver with thousands of moving specks, as though in some fantastic process of continuous, yet static disintegration.

He started to rub his eyes, when he was acutely aware of a crawling sensation on his right leg. He looked down and saw an ant.

It was quite an insect, fully an inch long, reddish-black and spider-legged. It was on his pantsleg and its elbowed antennae were exploring the fabric with rapt concentration. He believed it was the species called 'soldier ant'. He brushed it off.

Suddenly a god-awful apparition burst from the scrub only fifty yards ahead. It stumbled, went down on its foreknees and

began to squeal frantically. He couldn't tell what it was at first; it was completely covered with some sort of blackish mass that quivered in ripples, like a live coat of mail. Then it lunged to its feet and swung profile to Nils and he recognized it as a tapir, a swine-like creature. And he realized what was covering it.

Ants, he thought bleakly. *My God, Zompopas. Army ants.*

The tapir had had it now. It went down again, all the way, kicking, writhing, squealing in pain. The maggot-like mass was devouring the helpless pig alive; the grisly scene would be over in minutes.

Nils glanced down. There were dozens of the little insects on the ground — not too little, though, as ants go. They ranged from half an inch to an inch in length. Scouts. He looked around at the jungle wall again. All the creepers, leaves, pedals, fronds were trembling, coming apart.

Two little point-ants started for his left boot, and he stamped them into the soggy earth; then he started backing away, slowly at first, watching the troubled jungle. The crackling noise was very loud now. It seemed to sling a creeping sound around him.

Factually, he knew very little about them: only that they existed, that they were bad news, and that even a single ant could inflict a painful wound. The mandibles on the big soldiers

were capable of a fair-sized bite and some of them were armed with a sting which could inject formic acid.

The tales he had heard of the *Zompopas* were downright appalling. Some said they marched in armies of thousands, others said millions, and plenty said, "*Sangre de Cristo, amigo!* They come in billions!" And an entomologist he had met in Carangola claimed that a kingsize army marched in a formation two miles wide and ten miles long.

They could strip a full-grown man in five minutes. Everyone agreed on that gory point.

Five minutes . . .

Nils pressed the panic button. He turned and ran for the river. He was only halfway there when he heard Sordo scream.

EVEN AS HE shot out on the bank he knew he was too late; Sordo was hopping around like a barefoot man on a hot griddle, slapping violently at his shirt-front with one hand as he pawed at the back of his neck with the other. Obviously another detachment of scouts had already reached the bank and the deaf Indian.

Nils started running through the squelching mud.

Sordo had them on his forearms and he rushed over to a splay-footed mora to get the can of petrol he had parked in the shade earlier. He was whining

like a hurt dog and Nils, running, thought of the noise the doomed tapir had made when the *Zompopas* had started to take him apart thousands of meaty pieces at a time.

He slammed to a halt, sucking his breath. Two large spearheads of ants were coming from the scrub, right and left, as if with the purpose of flanking the two men on the riverbank; already he was cut off from Sordo. He spun around. Another brigade was scurrying out of the jungle behind him.

Thousands more were in the bushes, scampering along the stems and over the leaves. They began dropping onto the crouching Sordo.

"*Zompopas!*" Nils cried without thinking. "Sordo, watch out!"

It wouldn't have mattered even if Sordo could have heard him. They were on him now — in his hair, his ears, the back of his neck and shoulders. He sprang up screaming, flailing himself furiously; but, as usual, the ants made their first attack on his eyes.

The scouts scuttled into the visional orbs with their mandibles and stingers — and that's all, she wrote.

Blinded, mad with pain and terror, Sordo lurched in the wrong direction — into the ant-clad scrub. Wild-eyed, Nils fell back to the edge of the bank, shouting uselessly, "No! No, Sor-

do! This way! *Nombre de Dios, hombre!*"

There was nothing he could do for Sordo now; the Indian would be a skeleton in a few minutes. Nils jumped into the boat's cockpit and worked feverishly to cast off the stern mooring line before the ants could use it as a bridge.

He could no longer see Sordo but he could hear him. There was something unreal about the shrillness of the screams that ripped from the ant-ridden jungle. It seemed impossible that they could have come from a person known to him.

But they are real, he thought. *God in heaven, it's here! It's actually happening!* Then he thought, *God — get me out of this!*

He was in a tight box and he knew it. He couldn't escape along the banks, because the advance guard had already cut him off; and it would be madness to enter the jungle because the bulk of the ant army was waiting in there. Nor could he escape over the river. He didn't know how to swim.

That thoughtless idiot Paull he raged. *Why did he have to run off with the goddam dory!*

TWO-THREE DOZEN ants were scrambling along the mooring line, coming for him hungrily. He cast it into the water and, turning, raced forward to clear the other line.

A few scattered squads of ants were already on the roof of the deckhouse and on the forward deck; they crunched under his boots as he ran. A platoon of them was hurrying across the forward line as he pitched it back on the bank. A clot of struggling ants fell to the deck. One landed on his left hand and bit; Nils winced and clawed at the little three-part body. They didn't come off easily. They broke in sections.

He looked at the shore. A vast, crawling carpet of ants was scuttling across the bank; the army was throwing forward its shock troops. He couldn't believe how quickly they moved.

He snatched the boathook from the roof of the deckhouse and shoved the boat off, lunging his weight against the break in the bank. The boat moved clumsily, reluctantly. Then a drowsy eddy nudged the port's shoulder and slowly prodded the stern back to the bank. A squirming battalion of ants piled up on itself trying to climb aboard.

Their sense of organization was amazing — appalling. They grabbed on to one another and built themselves into bridges over the watery gap. Nils jabbed at the bank again with the pole and instantly the wooden haft was a crawl with ants. He couldn't knock them from the pole and he couldn't hold on to it or they would get to him. He

threw it overboard and ran back to the cockpit.

"Paul!" he cried. "Paul! Help! Help me, man!"

He darted down into the cabin, grabbed a sheet from one of the bunks, rushed back to the cockpit and lowered it over the side, making it heavy with water. He turned and struck with it — *whap whap whap*, slapping the gunwales free of scampering ants.

A sort of central intelligence motivated the army, and now it directed brigades of suicide troops down the bank to plug the gap with its own dead. It didn't really matter to the army if it suffered a thousand casualties here and there, because there were always hundreds of thousands more waiting to fill the ranks of those who had died. They poured down the bank in droves, trampling each other into the mud and under the water, and began to build a living, dying layercake — a wiggling abutment.

But this time the erratic eddy was against them; the motor yacht drifted lethargically away from the bank and fat clumps of leggy ants floundered in the torpid water.

Nils paused, swiping at his sweat-bubbling face, gasping for air. There were still four or five hundred ants aboard the boat but he thought he could handle them with the wet sheet.

If I could just get farther

away from the shore, he thought. If I could only get this scow out into the river . . .

The ant army also paused, as though formulating a plan of reorganization. Telegraphic-like instructions were swiftly tapped from antennae to antennae and, with orderly haste, divisions of ants defiled among the bushes. Nils watched them apprehensively.

THERE WAS a great deal of activity in the rear; then pack trains of ants returned to the front bearing a collection of large saucer-like cecropia leaves. They pioneered down the bank and placed the leathery leaves in the ant-corpsed water, as lines of soldier ants filed mechanically after them.

Nils had heard of the *Zompopas* doing what they were now preparing to do, but he had thought that the accomplishment belonged entirely to legend. Now he saw that it was fact; the ants were going to raft over to the boat.

Frantic, he dodged around the open hatch and stepped down to stoop over the motor, his hand fumbling in the shadows over the inexplicable water manifold, cylinders, stuffing boxes, and found a large can of oil. He yanked it up to the cockpit and, his trembling fingers nearly nerveless, spun off the cap and began to pour the amber-olive fluid over the side. He

walked forward along the starboard as he poured.

Arriving at the bow with the now-empty can, he pitched it away, fished out a match, thumb-snapped the head and threw the flaming splinter overboard. The oil caught with a flare of light and smoke and a leaping finger of fire raced along the entire length of the boat.

The fleet of ants already embarked on their leaf-rafts crackled in the flames as they scrambled all over each other wildly. Their dark bodies glistened scarlet and their legs and antennae curled up and vanished. They seemed to melt, to shrivel into twisted bits of charred sticks.

It gave Nils a few moments of respite. He sagged against the deckhouse, staring at the havoc he had caused on the little watery battlefield. Exhausted and reeking with perspiration, he wondered: What next? What would the voracious army try next in order to reach him with their countless and insatiable mandibles?

He realized that he was fighting to retain a sanity that hung on the very edge of gibbering madness, and he feared that it was a losing battle. "If they come for me again," he muttered, "I'll go crazy! Stark foaming crazy!"

Suddenly he was screaming at the restive ant army — obscene,

saliva-spattered words which overlapped unintelligibly with the pent-up release of outraged emotion.

"... dirtybitchingbastards!"

The *Zompopas* were on the move again. They defiled up the trees, along the lacy branches and across the ropy vines. The vegetated sky poured ants; they rained on the boat.

Thousands of silent, scaly insects drop-drop-dropped. He couldn't fight them off; and, in his animal-like panic, all he could think of was a place to hide. He ran aft to the cockpit and plunged down the steps into the cramped cabin, his harassed brain riotous with dread thoughts.

There's no cabin door on this scow! One of the portholes is completely missing!

He plugged the empty port with a pillow, snatched up a bunk mattress and jammed it in the small doorway. Then he looked at the floor. Some ants were already in the cabin with him.

Kayrice, the fore starboard port is open!

A STEADY TRAIN of ants was filing down the cabin wall. He jerked loose a pillowcase and began beating them with it, slamming shut the porthole with his left hand. He felt one two three fiery bites on his legs as the razor-sharp mandibles reached his flesh.

He stamped and clawed at his legs; he swung the pillowcase at the ants, over and over again, and he screamed at them, "Damnyoul Damnyoul Damnyoul!"

The ants in the deckhouse were finding small openings around the edges of the hurriedly-placed mattress. They struggled into the cabin, regrouped into squadrons and started down the steps, scrabbling across the deck on their little spidery legs.

Nils stopped fighting. His shoulders slumped and he stood there in the humid, airless cabin and watched them come. *God, omebody, help me*, he thought.

He turned to the little stained sink and picked up one of Paul's single-edged razorblades. He held out his left wrist, over-turned. *Got to be*, he told himself. *And right now, before they get to me and do to me what they did to the tapir and that poor goddamned Sordo and Lord knows how many other luckless creatures. So — do it!*

But the hand that held the razorblade wouldn't budge. It was adhered to the sink with the tenacity of fixed resolve, as a very small but irrefutable valve in his mind shut off this means of escape through self-destruction. The revelation staggered him, yet he knew he was facing a home truth. Some could do it, most could not. Even in his present hopeless situation he

belonged to the majority group.

He dropped the blade and looked at the ants. They were picking their way toward him with methodical and inexorable precision. It seemed inconceivable to Nils that this mass of mindless, soulless, voracious little insects was going to kill him. He was the end result of a highly complicated process of evolution that had started millions of years ago; and they were going to eat him alive.

Drowning is better than that, he decided. And it wouldn't be the same as giving up, because he would still be fighting for his life right down to the last wet breath.

He grabbed a blanket and went into the close, hot compartment under the foredeck. Sweat streamed from him as if he were jammed into a steam-bath, and for a weak moment, as his stomach lurched into nausea, he didn't think he could go on. Because when he made his move, his final one, it would have to be done with quick precision or they would be all over him before he could reach the water.

Come on, he said to himself. *Quit stalling, you gutless wonder.*

"All right," he said.

Taking the blanket in both hands, he raised it over his head, stepped up on the ladder and shoved open the hatch. He went up in a rush, flopped the blank-

et over the swarm of ants on the strip of deck on the port side and then scrambled over it himself, rising to his feet and taking a long stepping leap overboard.

THE GREENISH-OPAQUE water crashed in his face and he cringed as he went under, thinking of what it was going to be like when it highballed down his strangling throat, but thinking also that he would rather have it this way than let the ants have their way.

His feet struck bottom. He couldn't believe it; he'd had no idea the river was shallow. His head shoved up and broke the surface and he sucked air, hearing at the same time Paul's excited voice yelling from somewhere.

"Nils! Nils! This way!"

Which way? God almighty which way? The water was up to his shoulders and he started wading and it was like trying to wade through a fishnet armed with hooks. Clots and clots of flabby ants were on the surface of the water and they scrambled over his neck and head loathsome as they tried to use him as a little island of safety.

His head was a writhing mass of ants, and he had only one blurred glimpse of Paul rowing frantically upriver, and then he lost his footing and went under and started pawing wildly at his face, and came up again and

into more struggling ants again, and he couldn't get his breath with ants and water both in his mouth.

He submerged, thrashing out blindly, crazily, convinced that this was his exact last moment. Then his forward-swinging left hand came down on wood; his soused head shot up and he saw that he and the dory had made contact. Paul had already pivoted the craft around and Nils was clinging to the stern.

"Go on!" he cried. "Get us out of here!"

Paul needed no prompting. Ants were dropping from the vines and branches overhead by dozens. He rammed the dory pell-mell down the river, dragging Nils behind. Nils climbed over the stern and collapsed in a soggy heap. But only for a moment; his ghastly little passengers were still swarming horribly over his body.

"Gee-sus!" Paul hissed. "Get rid of them for godsake!"

Nils tore off his pulpy shirt and lashed himself and the dory free of the ants. Then he threw the soaking ant-smearred shirt overboard with a gesture of revulsion.

"Never — never so glad to see anyone in my entire life," he gasped, sinking down to a thwart. Paul grinned fleetingly.

"Didn't think I could get to you in time," he said. "Wouldn't have, either, if you hadn't been able to swim down to meet me."

"I didn't swim," Nils said. "I can't. Not a stroke."

Paul glanced at him wonderingly. "You're wrong, you know. That last twenty feet you covered was well over your head; I had sounded it earlier. Funny what fear can do for a man."

Yeah, Nils thought, staring back at the ant-squirming boat. Very funny.



The Laughing Duke

by Wallace West

(author of *A Thing of Beauty, Sacrilege*)

This story, like a number of the early tales by the author, was originally published under the by-line WALLACE G. WEST; the name was seen first in the October 1927 issue of WEIRD TALES, the story being *Loup-Garou* – but Wally tells me that this was really a collaboration. Thus, the first true WGW story in WT was *The Incubator Man*, October 1928 issue. There were only six appearances in WT altogether, and one of them, *Moon Madness* became the first section of his novel, *Outposts in Space*, published by Avalon.

IN THE OLD time, when the world was full of a number of things which have since been forgotten, a great man lay dying at his castle in the land of Provence.

He was Florian of Orthow, known throughout France as the Laughing Duke, and he was gasping out his life in his tall

canopied bed from the effects of what had at first been considered a minor dagger wound in the back.

Monsieur Morand, the physician, felt the nobleman's pulse for the last time, gathered up his leeches in their little jars, his lancet, the bleeding-bowl which held a few ounces of wa-

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tery fluid which he had just drained from the duke's veins, and shook his head sorrowfully.

"I have done all I can," he announced, bowing to Sir Robert, the duke's nephew and now rightful heir. "It distresses me greatly to see such a fine gentleman die at the hands of a cowardly assassin, but my medicines can do no more."

Sir Robert shook his black curly head slowly and replied: "Tis not your fault, doctor, but that of my scoundrelly cousin who lies in prison awaiting the hangman."

"Come," he added. "There is nothing more you can do here. I know you will wish to prepare for your long journey back to Paris and I would have a word with you before you depart. Monsignor Bellaire" (he bowed to a monstrosly fat, sweet-faced monk who sat at the bedside) "will watch over my uncle until I return."

Robert led the way to his uncle's spacious library, a tall gloomy room lined with strange, incomprehensible books by such savants as Paracelus, Van Helmont and Agrippa von Nettesheim. Once there he locked the door carefully and his whole attitude changed.

"Jacques," he said to the doctor, "you have played your part well. Although you never held a license from any college of surgeons you have bled the life out of yon old buzzard in a

workman-like and thorough-going manner. Here is your reward."

He dropped a sack of gold into the claw-like hand extended.

"But remember, our lives are not safe until the crow of my cousin Gilbert has been properly stretched at Avignon prison. And," he added sharply, "if you should dare turn traitor and cross me" — the pseudo-physician's wizened face paled before the steady glare of those black eyes — "if you should cross me, I shall cross you in a somewhat different fashion, though I die for it." And Black Robert, as he was known to his few friends and many enemies, significantly touched the dagger at his side.

Be it said for the physician that he did not visibly quail.

"Your grace knows I have served you well on other occasions," he replied calmly. "Better receive small pay from one you can trust," and he sneered slightly as he weighed the sack of ducats in his hand, "than have your gullet slit by others who make better promises."

IN THE SICKROOM at that moment a terrific struggle seemed to be going on in the dying man. Under its shock of silver hair the duke's face, whose bloodless outlines had a few minutes before been marked by the peaceful seal of death, twitched and quivered as though

the soul, at the very moment of departure, had decided to return.

With a desperate effort the old man sat erect. His hands emerged from under the bed-clothing. His voice croaked unintelligibly.

Hurriedly the priest slipped one hand behind the dying man's shoulders and whispered reassuringly, "Yes, yes."

But this only increased the duke's fury. At last his voice became audible.

"A pen. A pen," he rasped. "Write! Write!"

The priest placed a wetted goose-quill in his writhing fingers and a large piece of parchment on his knees.

As though his soul were driving an already dead body, the hand began to move jerkily.

"From knowledge vouchsafed me while dying," the words sprawled crazily across the page, "I, Florian, Duke of Orthow, hereby disinherit my nephew, Robert the Black-hearted, and charge him with having mur—"

Here the pen went out of control. Grimly the man on the bed fought to make it conform to his iron will, but in vain. The goose-quill slipped gradually from his stiffening fingers.

At that moment the great door of the chamber opened and Sir Robert returned.

The duke looked up, his writing forgotten. One emaciated

arm rose shakily, but the fingers hung limp as he tried to shake his fist at the younger man.

"I heard! I heard!" cried he in the same great voice with which he had many times led men to battle. "Robin, thou cowardly ingrate. I—will—return!"

Then, as he saw the altered look on the face of his nephew the old man burst out into a great laugh. It rang through the dusk of the bedchamber like a bugle call — that same laugh which had made the duke famous throughout all France; mocking, debonair and unafraid of God or devil.

And, still laughing, the duke toppled backward on the pillows. This time he was entirely a corpse.

Pale as though he had met a ghost, Black Robert advanced to the bedside, roughly pushing away a nurse who had rushed to his uncle's assistance. Picking up a mirror, he held it to the still lips. There was no cloud upon the glass. The breath had stopped.

"Strange that his mind should wander at the last," said the knight in a shaken voice. "I had hoped he might die content. But it must have been delirium," he added, looking stealthily at Mon-signor Bellaire. "Did he say anything else?"

"Nothing beyond asking for pen and parchment."

The new Duke of Orthow snatched at the paper. As he

saw the writing was meaningless a sickly smile spread over his swarthy, handsome countenance.

"Vagaries of a wandering mind," he muttered. "But they hurt. For I loved him like a son since he took me and my ungrateful cousin under his protection years ago."

He bowed his head, gave a few orders relative to funeral arrangements and walked slowly from the room to the accompaniment of muttered prayers from Father Bellaire, who was kneeling at the foot of the bed, and muffled sobs from the nurse, who had loved her master.

The funeral was held with all the pomp of a great house. Not many days thereafter Duke Robert mounted his black charger and, with his great, two-handed sword clanking in its scabbard between his shoulder-blades, rode down to Avignon to see that justice was done to that rascally Gilbert, who had been convicted of stabbing his uncle in the back.

NOT MANY WEEKS later Monsignor Bellaire officiated at another death-bed, that of Lady Dorothy, daughter of the widowed Duchess of Mecklenberg, whose castle lay not far from that of Orthow.

"Ah, Dorothy, Dorothy," the good priest murmured, stroking the soft chestnut hair of the beautiful girl who lay pining her heart away between the silken

sheets. "Why will you mourn for Duke Robert, who is unworthy of you? His ambitions have made him forget your love for him. That should show he was unworthy of your love. Forget him. Smile at the sun once again, as you did when I taught you your catechism years ago."

But the girl only turned her face a little more toward the wall. The monk sighed and glanced at the physician.

Dr. Vosberg shook his head sorrowfully.

"It is no use, father," he said. "Physically there is nothing wrong with her, yet life is flowing from Lady Dorothy as though from a sieve. She refuses to live. Poor, foolish girl."

The priest nodded.

"Strange," he said. "She loved Robert, while Gilbert loved her. And now Robert is Duke of Orthow and has pledged his troth to another, while Gilbert, who was to have been the duke, rots in Avignon prison. I wonder," he added thoughtfully, "if Gilbert really killed the old duke. It was not his nature."

The doctor's answer was interrupted by a slight commotion on the bed. "Look," he cried. "The end has come." Picking up the inevitable mirror he held it to the quiet lips. Not a cloud showed.

Father Bellaire crossed himself and began murmuring the liturgy for the dead.

"Not yet, father!"

It was the girl who had spoken.

Both men started thunder-struck as Dorothy turned her face from the wall and opened her eyes.

"Not yet, father," she repeated. "I'm not dead. There's too much for me to do." She actually tried to sit up but was too weak.

"Dorothy, Dorothy," cried the priest, his face bathed in tears. "My child has returned."

"Yes, perhaps," replied the girl, her rich contralto voice growing strong. "But have them bring me some food, I'm abominably hungry."

Dorothy's recovery was almost miraculously rapid. Within two days she was up and about and frightening her mother, the widowed duchess, with her strange caprices. For somewhere during her illness the girl had acquired a mordant sarcasm unlike that of her former gentle self.

In fact, her language showed traces of the vitriol of an old campaigner when she used it upon retainers of the duchy who had grown lax in their duties since the duke's death.

As she grew stronger Dorothy strode about the castle and its environs with a lithe, free stride that made her mother blush and remonstrate in vain, and tongue-lashed the gardeners, the hostlers, the peasants and the overseers until the duchy, which had been falling

into decay, began to resume the appearance of old times.

"Dorothy, Dorothy," moaned the duchess, who was the soul of propriety, "whatever has come over you? Where has my sweet girl gone? You have forgotten your embroidery and your painting and go tramping about for all the world as if you were a man."

"Don't worry, mother," answered her daughter, kissing her tenderly. "But, damn it all, there's so much to be done. I've almost regained my strength now. When I'm fit I'll be leaving you for a while. Dark deeds have been done in Provence, and I am the only one who can right them."

Turning on her heel in the dress which she had shortened beyond all seemliness, Dorothy left her mother staring open-mouthed.

A week thereafter a youth, dressed in light but costly chain armor and wearing at his side a slim scabbard which held the strangest sword ever seen in Provence, slipped out of the postern gate of Mecklenberg at dawn, leading the slim gray horse which once had been a favorite of the duke. Mounting, he rode briskly down the road toward Avignon.

The duchess fainted some hours later when her maid reported that Dorothy was nowhere to be found.

IN AVIGNON PRISON Gilbert of Orthow sat watching the construction of his own gallows from the window of his cell. It was a spring morning. Flowers were blossoming in crannies of the prison yard. A robin hopped upon the ledge of his barred window and eyed him pertly. Gilbert tossed it a few crumbs which were left from his breakfast and smiled faintly.

He was a handsome chap, with curly red hair, blue eyes with depths to them and a long, lean body. His face showed the strain of his many days in prison; his skin was pale. But there was a quirk in the corners of his mouth as he watched the bird eagerly gobbling the crumbs.

"That's right, old fellow. Enjoy yourself while you may," he chuckled, the robin cocking one round eye at him the while. "Eat heartily, for tomorrow you too may fall into a snare."

In the prison yard all was activity, for it was not often the warden had opportunity of hanging the cousin of a duke. The gallows was being built strong and high. The Duke of Orthow himself had given advice on its construction.

Gilbert, tired of watching the workmen and the soft blue sky which he would see no more after the next two days, sat down on his pallet and eased the leg shackle which bound him to the wall.

It was a cruel thing with teeth inside which bit into the flesh if he moved suddenly.

"Don't kick against the pricks!" he quoted. "But I'm lucky not to be in the stinking dungeon. It must have been dear Rob's idea to place me where I could see the gallows go up."

He sighed. His only consolation during the month of his imprisonment had been occasional visits from Father Bel-laïre. The tall, rotund prelate, with his gentle voice and friendly humor, wedged himself into the cell whenever he could leave his pastoral duties and joked with or comforted the prisoner as need was.

But Gilbert knew he was making his parish rounds today and could not come.

The condemned man's meditations were broken by the rattling of keys in the ponderous lock of the cell door. The night guard entered, yawning, for it was near the end of his watch. Behind him was a friar in black robe and tightly drawn cowl.

"The priest asked to see you," said the guard roughly but not unkindly. "I brought him in, as I thought since you will be stretched all out of shape presently you would want to come to some sort of terms with God." He grinned. "When you are through, call for Henri," he added to the priest. "He will let you out, I will be off duty."

GILBERT STARED AT the newcomer as the guard withdrew. When they were alone the friar tossed back his cowl and stepped into the sunlight which had just begun pouring through the high window.

"Dorothy!" cried the prisoner. "How come you here? And I heard you were ill unto death at Castle Mecklenberg."

She laughed, a low throaty murmur which made the robin who still sat upon the window-ledge so jealous he abandoned hope of more crumbs and took flight.

"I thought better of dying," she replied. "Listen. There is little time for talking. We must get out of here as soon as the guards change." She waved aside his startled remonstrance. "Enough to say I know you are innocent and that Robert is as black a villain as his nickname would indicate."

"But you are mad!" cried Gilbert. "Look. They are building my gallows already. Before two suns have set I shall be as dead as my uncle."

"You may be wrong on both points," smiled the girl. "Be quiet and I shall tell you how we may fool these dolts of guards and escape. See," she took from under her cassock another robe. "This was made for Father Bellaire. It would cover a—griffin. We will fix it—so."

She threw the garment over his shoulders and pulled the

cowl tight.

"Now stand still while I show you a trick I learned in Florence—I mean a trick I heard was once used there. Look. I will stand on your toes—so. I am quite short, thank heaven. Now pull the robe about both of us. There! Doesn't that make a sizable paunch for you? Now fold your hands piously as Father Bellaire does, bow your head and waddle ponderously about.

"Splendid," she cried, popping her head from under the cassock. "That would fool the good devil himself. Now, quick, quick! Roll the bedclothes to represent Sir Gilbert of Orthow lying on his pallet trying to snatch a few hours of troubled rest before he goes where rest is never troubled. When the new guard passes he must see Father Bellaire sadly contemplating a sleeping prisoner. Oh, that sleepy Armand will never think to tell his friend Henri it is not Father Bellaire who visits you today. At least I hope not. If he does, it will be adieu, my friend."

"But Dorothy, I can not allow you to imperil yourself like this for me," cried Gilbert, who had just managed to catch his breath after all the preparations. "I insist that you . . ."

"Insist! Insist! Who are you to insist? You're the same as a dead man. Did you ever defy your uncle when he told you to do something for your own good and the good of France? Well,

your uncle has made me his agent—never mind how—so do as you're told, youngster."

With no more ado she set to work at the soft iron of his gyves with a file, muffling the sound under her robe.

AN HOUR LATER, when that work was done, there was the clank of halberds in the corridor as the guard was changed. The two conspirators took their positions.

"Your blessing, Father Belaire," said Henri a few minutes later as he peered through the door on his tour of inspection.

"You have it, my son," replied Gilbert from beneath his cowl, endeavoring to imitate the quiet voice of the prelate.

Henri passed on without suspicion.

"Now for it," came the muffled voice of Dorothy a few minutes later. "I'm almost smothered under this robe."

The guard returned at Gilbert's call and unlocked the door. Striving as best he could to imitate the shuffling gait of the man he was supposed to be, the prisoner and his living burden followed Henri down the hall and into the courtyard.

The long robe swept the ground and evidently no one noticed his awkwardness.

Out the prison gate they stumbled and into the crooked streets. Gilbert felt his heart beating heavily with the strain

and the girl's fluttering in answer to it.

"Turn up the first alley," she whispered. "There are horses for us there. Is anybody about?"

"Only a few laborers. They see nothing wrong about a lopsided priest. But best be silent . . ."

Slowly he plowed through the mud of the fetid alley she had indicated until two tethered horses came in sight.

Dorothy slipped from his arms and shed her robe. He saw she was dressed in a jerkin of mail and rich, dark trunks. On her saddle-bow were strapped a velvet cloak and a queer sort of sword.

"Up with you," she cried gayly. "Keep your robe. You shall still be a priest escorting a knight on some holy journey. Have no fear, Dobbin will not throw you, father," she mocked.

From under the edge of his cowl Gilbert stared with amazement and secret delight at this stalwart, beautiful Diana, who rode her charger straight as a soldier and whistled a rollicking song of the camps as they left the awakening town, passed by the palace of the popes and rode out into the flowering hedges and orchards of the open country.

He had loved Dorothy as a quiet, bashful girl, who sat with downcast eyes beside her mother, embroidering or playing the harpsichord. But as he saw her

now, her sweet, softly rounded figure revealed in the clinging mail, she was infinitely more lovable, even though her language, when her horse stumbled once, was not—well . . .

"Dorothy . . ." he said, then stopped, for there was so much to ask.

She smiled at him.

"Proceed, Sir Knight, and I will endeavor to alleviate your unquenchable curiosity," she jeered, and rode on chuckling at his flood of questions, most of which she skilfully avoided answering.

Knowing the alarm would be given at the next round of the guard they rode toward Paris at top speed, for there the girl said she might obtain evidence to prove her companion's innocence.

It was a long journey. Though the weather was fine some of the roads still were hock-deep in mud. They slept on horseback and talked little after the first day.

At a village armorer's shop Gilbert found a corselet of lapped steel scales which was not heavy and enabled him to shed his shabby prison raiment and assume the guise of a gentleman once more.

They obtained changes of horses frequently and felt confident of out-distancing all pursuit.

IT WAS DUSK a week later

when they rode unchallenged through the gates of Paris. It had rained that day and their horses sloshed wearily through the tortuous, ill-paved and worse-drained streets.

"Now that we're here," grumbled Gilbert, "you might tell me what you intend to do."

"Softly, softly, Sir Knight," she replied. "First we shall seek one Jacques Morand, physician extraordinary and friend of the new Duke of Orthow. That should be simple unless he is living under an assumed name. We shall look first into the dives and second into the prisons. If he is in neither place, God help us."

With a dexterity which showed her entirely familiar with the infamous by-streets of Paris, Dorothy led the way toward Montmartre, inquiring at likely and boisterous dens regarding the object of their search.

It was not long until a blousy landlord recalled a Dr. Morand.

"Aye! A truly great physician," he declared, spreading apart his fat hands. "Always with money in his pocket. Not three days ago he royally entertained his friends here, and paid me a pretty penny for the privilege. Just now he is recovering from that entertainment. You probably will find him, gentlemen, in his chemise's shop at the corner of the Rues Falaise and Burgos."

Following his directions they were not long in drawing up be-

fore the shop, if such it might be called. It was located in a foul-smelling basement from which a slippery flight of stairs led to the street.

They descended noiselessly, and peered through a dirty window. A candle, stuck in a wine-bottle, sat on a long table just inside. Near it the pseudo-physician hunched over a great tome, laboriously spelling out the Latin words. A yellow cat sat upright beyond the candle and stared unwinkingly into the flame.

From time to time Morand would dip his hand into a basin beside him and return it full of sunflower seeds which he nibbled at his leisure.

"Now," whispered Dorothy. "You are stronger. Hold him while I stuff a handkerchief into his mouth and bind him with the rope of your cassock."

Together they flung their shoulders against the door. It crashed open. Morand leaped to his feet, one hand still full of seeds, the other gripping a wicked dagger. Behind him the cat swelled to twice its normal size and spat.

It was a quick fight and merry, but Monsieur Morand was out of training and soon was tripped up, bound, gagged and flung into a corner. The cat crouched beside side.

"Now what?" queried Gilbert.

"First push the table against the door and draw the shades."

directed Dorothy. "Then, I suppose," she added in a louder tone, "we shall have to torture this dog until he confesses who hired him to murder Duke Florian."

The figure in the corner writhed and gurgled.

"We will try a trick I learned—I mean that was used during the wars with Italy," she continued, winking one brown eye at Gilbert. "It can't possibly maim a man. Of course he may drown, if he's stubborn, but that's his own fault."

"Do you fasten this person face upward on the floor. Tie his arms and legs to anything solid. He mustn't be able to squirm. Now I need a good, strong funnel. Ah, here is one that's just right. Lucky we are dealing with a famous physician who keeps such trifles handy. Now, most important, I must have water."

She searched carefully, but no water was available.

"Well, this will do just as well," she said finally, trundling a cask of wine from the shadows. "He will at least die happy."

"Splendid work, Gil," she continued in her semi-monotone as she saw her early instructions had been obeyed. "Now sit you down and hold this fine gentleman's nose, firmly—so, while I remove this gag and insert the end of the funnel between his teeth. Bravol 'Tis done."

"Now, friend Jacques," she

snapped, all her raillery gone, "will you sign a confession telling who hired you to bleed Duke Florian to his death, and also who had him stabbed in the dark?"

"You devil," gasped the rat-faced physician through his funnel, "let me up at once or I shall shout for the guard."

"So, you are obdurate," said his tormenter. "Hold his nose tightly, Gilbert. We shall strive to dampen his ardor."

Dipping a big ladle of wine from the cask, she poured it gurgling down the funnel. Morand spluttered, choked, then, to get air again, drank the potion in long gulps.

"Now will you sign?" queried the girl.

He shook his head stubbornly, but there was a look of terror in his eyes. She refilled the ladle and poured again.

Gilbert felt sick but kept tight hold on the prone man's nostrils as he heaved and struggled.

THE BATTLE WAS won as Dorothy filled the dipper for the sixth time. His eyes distended, his face purple, the miserable doctor nodded his head frantically as the wine hovered over him.

"Oh, God, no more!" he panted when he could breathe again. "I'm splitting. A pen—paper. I'll tell everything; only put that cursed funnel away."

And tell everything he did as

he crouched again beside the candle and scribbled furiously while his teeth chattered like castanets.

The gist of the document was that Sir Robert, realizing that Gilbert, being slightly older and a favorite, would receive the title at the death of Duke Florian, had hit upon a scheme of stabbing the old man and throwing the blame on his cousin.

The project succeeded so well that when servants, hearing the duke's cries, rushed to the courtyard where he had been walking, they found him with Gilbert's dagger between his ribs from behind while Gilbert himself was kneeling beside the wounded man.

"Aye. I heard him cry out and ran to see what was wrong," muttered Gilbert as this point in the writing was reached. "There the servants found me and at the orders of Robert locked me in the dungeon."

But Sir Florian, being hale, in spite of his sixty-five years, refused to die, the confession continued, and it was necessary to bring into the case one Dr. Jacques Morand of Paris, whom Robert called the greatest surgeon in France but who was in reality a rascally drinking companion of university days.

There was little more. The duke expired in spite of all Dr. Morand could do and the latter departed for Paris after having received a really staggering fee

from the new pretender, Gilbert in the meantime having been duly convicted of murder and incarcerated in Avignon prison.

WITH THE confession in hand and the still chattering chemist between them, Gilbert and Dorothy appeared at Plessis-les-Tours palace the next morning to wait upon the king.

It was only after long debate that they had decided to enter the "spider's nest" bristling with watch-towers and guards, where Louis XI, the "terrible king," was making a last desperate fight against a loathsome disease.

Gilbert was for riding back to Orthow, raising a levy and laying siege to the castle. But Dorothy pointed out that Louis, who had obtained nominal sovereignty over the province the year before, could make Robert's position absolutely untenable if he fastened blame for the murder upon him. As usual her counsel prevailed.

Evidently they still were ahead of the news of Gilbert's escape, because the monarch, learning the heir of the Duchy of Mecklenberg (and a likely-looking wench at that) was waiting to see him on an affair of importance, received them in his bedchamber.

The ungainly monarch seemed feeling better than usual. He had not bothered to don the gorgeous raiment under which he still tried to hide his infirmities from

the eyes of foreign diplomats.

Instead he greeted them wrapped in the dirty gray cloak which he had worn when he prowled about France in his younger days, and with the old felt hat, from which dangled the leaden figure of a saint, pulled well down over his eyes.

His keen, piercing eyes and long hooknose gave his grotesque face the appearance of the head of a bird of prey, but his rickety legs, extended straight before him as he sat in a heavy padded chair, disclosed his weakness.

"Come forward, my lady," the king said in his most honeyed accents as they entered. "To what do I owe this visit from one of my newest subjects?" His eyes approvingly swept her slim figure in its masculine disguise, for Louis, until the day of his death, was not above appreciating a well-turned limb.

"I regret the necessity of appearing before Your Majesty in this unseemly garb," said his visitor, curtsying deeply, "but it is a matter of life and death which can not delay." And she told her story and produced the confession.

As Louis read, his long, lantern-jawed face clouded with fury.

"Damme," he cried, his voice cracking with age and anger. "There shall be much hanging in my duchy of Orthow, if I be not mistaken. And who are

these," he demanded, appearing to look for the first time at Dorothy's companions.

When he learned and heard Morand's stammering confirmation of the confession, his majesty did not hesitate.

"Take this rat to the dungeons," he ordered, pointing out the chemist to the guards. "We will have him tortured at our leisure." Then from an astrologer who stood behind his chair in spangled robe and pointed cap, Louis took pen, ink, paper and his seal.

A few minutes later he handed to Gilbert the royal edict, which read:

"I, Louis, King of France, hereby decree that for the murder of his uncle and my loyal friend, Duke Florian of Orthow, the lands and chattels of Robert, pretender to the title, shall be declared forfeit, he shall be outlawed, and Sir Gilbert shall be named Duke of Orthow in his place.

LOUIS, REX."

"Will you need troops to help you reconquer the duchy?" the king then asked Gilbert. "You have only to ask for as many of the royal forces as you require."

But Gilbert recalled that the king, ever avid for new taxes, seldom recalled his troops when once they were quartered in outlying provinces; so he declined with thanks.

"None will fight against us when they learn of Your Majesty's decree," he explained, bow-

ing low. "Black Robert is not loved at Orthow. Besides, I have only to ask for troops from Mecklenberg and they will be supplied without causing you such great expense."

Louis smiled crookedly as he measured the new duke of Orthow with his cunning little eyes, but he nodded and let them go.

ONCE MORE IN the open country, Dorothy showed no haste to return to Orthow Castle.

"There is time enough," she temporized when Gilbert wanted them to spur forward. "Let news of the king's decree precede us. Then we shall not be in danger of being thrown into prison at every crossroad."

"And besides, life is sweet," she sighed, her usual merry smile vanishing, "and there is so little of it left for me—for all of us. Let us idle along under the blue sky and forget our high destiny for a while."

So idle they did, sometimes wandering far afield when blossoming hedgerows beckoned, or spending long hours in the sunshine lying under the trees and talking idly of everything in the world.

Gilbert was continually amazed at the wide experience and knowledge of the world which this chit of a girl seemed to have. She told him of old campaigns, the gay cities of Spain and Italy, and the famous

personages of a bygone generation.

"How did you learn all this?" he puzzled.

"From my father, who fought in the wars," she would answer lightly, and go on to some new picaresque tale which made him roar with laughter.

At night they would stop at the jolly French inns and carouse a bit with the wandering adventurers and friars and country people whom they met there.

Sometimes there were sly glances cast at Dorothy's slim figure in its hose and jerkin, but that was only at first arrival. For she drank the Rhenish wines with the best of them and shouted the rollicking songs of the day in a passable tenor until no doubt remained in the mind of anyone present that she was the spoiled son of some important nobleman. Eventually she became the center of any group they chanced to meet.

And when the night was far gone she would draw the slender sword she always wore and extol its merits to any who might yet be able to listen. A Spanish blade, she said it was, made in Toledo. Its like never had been seen in France before, although a century or so later it was destined to replace the clumsy two-handed swords which had been the weapon of the country since William the Conqueror hewed his way through Hastings.

"Ah, she is a graceful wench,

my Toledo blade," Dorothy would croon, bending the long, needle-sharp thing between her slim white hands. "None can stand before her."

Sometimes she would induce a wandering swordsman to fence with her, almost always to his discredit, for the rapier slipped in and out between thrusts of the heavier blades with uncanny ease.

At first the girl handled her weapon somewhat clumsily, though with understanding, like one who was trying to force forgotten muscles into a well-remembered task. But as the days passed she began to show an almost uncanny aptitude.

As he stood in the drafty taproom while Dorothy and some puzzled opponent stamped and lunged inside a circle of shouting yokels, Gilbert marveled continually.

Here was a girl of steel, defying all the conventions of the time, when women were supposed to be helpless, fainting creatures who spent their days drawing mournful music from harpsichords or doing fancy-work in the quiet of some protected gallery. By all the rules he should have abhorred this hoyden who told screamingly funny risque stories, liked her wine and treated him as a companion rather than a lover.

But he could not but admire her. The adoration which he had felt for the Dorothy of other

days, before she had broken his heart by succumbing to the wiles of his handsomer, courtlier cousin, was that which an acolyte feels for a saint. This burgeoning passion which he felt now was something greater, and, he was sure, much finer.

But Dorothy would hear none of his talk of love.

"Enough time for that," she would reply, "when we have settled with Robert of the Black Heart, who spurned me for that Italian wench, the daughter of Count Guzzi. Such an alliance, he thought, would add more power to his duchy. We shall see.

"For the present you and I are friends only, Gilbert — two youngsters having a gorgeous jaunt through the springtime."

She looked at him closely, strangely, as if about to confide some secret, then shook her head.

"Ah, Gilbert," she continued, "you will not understand, but in the days to come remember I once told you that though the soul is sexless I do love you as a flower loves the sun. But for the present there is work to be done and God knows what thereafter."

She steadfastly kept their relations on a placid basis. They rode together, drank together, once fought together when a gang of cutthroats waylaid them. At night they quite often slept in the same room, for accommo-

dations were scarce. But, according to the old custom of the Crusades, Gilbert's sword always was laid between them.

And always she ignored his growing passion and tried to interest him instead in the efficacy of her long, vibrant rapier.

"For see," she explained, "your clumsy weapon is obsolete. It was fine for hewing through armor in the old-time jousts, no doubt. But my lady will slip between the joints of the finest chain mail with one-tenth the effort."

Gilbert shook his head stubbornly.

"A fine weapon for a girl, especially when she insists on going about the country in man's clothing," he admitted. "Quite fitted for a woman's strength. But I will have none of your knitting-needles. I want a sword that sings and will cleave a man to the breastbone if need be."

"Aye, if need be," she mocked him, her pretty nose in the air. "But don't forget, my dear duke-that-is-to-be, a man will die just as swiftly and with much less mess if he is jabbed properly through the heart."

DELAY THE journey as she would, the pair at last arrived on the outskirts of Orthow. News of their coming had, of course, gone before, and the peasants flocked to greet them.

Robert, they said, still was at Castle Orthow, swearing he was

innocent and that he would hold his territory at all costs. But his troops, although they feared him too much to mutiny, would not lift a hand against the rightful heir, everyone was agreed.

"But why doesn't he escape to Italy, where he would be given sanctuary in Florence at least?" Gilbert wondered.

"Robin run away?" cried Dorothy. "That shows how little you know him. He is a scoundrel but never a coward. Robert knows we come alone. He thinks if he dispatches you enough scapegraces will rally to support him so he can defy King Louis, especially if he can induce Count Guzzi to aid him. Well, he still has me to reckon with!"

"You will stay out of this," said Gilbert sternly. "My cousin is the best swordsman in France, since my uncle's death. I will not permit you to draw that silly weapon against him."

"Oh, very well," she sighed humbly. "I only hope he doesn't kill you, for he is the better swordsman. I'll come along to see that some of his scoundrels don't stab you in the back. Better get some heavy armor at the next village."

And, with an effrontery which made all his subjects devoted slaves from that day forth, Gilbert and his companion rode straight toward the gates of Orthow Castle.

It loomed, menacing and vast, against its snowy alpine back-

ground as they approached. The sun, although it was an hour before setting, had a dull luster which lighted the countryside with a reddish glare. Not a breath of wind moved. Not a bird chirped.

Evidently they were expected, for as they arrived the drawbridge was lowered and a single rider came slowly across the moat.

It was Robert.

"Good even, cousin," he said, a crooked smile showing under his dark mustache behind the lifted vizor of his helmet. "I suppose you have come to kill me."

"Good even, Lady Dorothy," he added, bowing over his horse's mane. "I hoped to see you in seemlier garb and in better company."

With those words his mighty sword came rasping from its shoulder scabbard. He spurred his horse forward. Gilbert did likewise. They met with the shock of an earthquake, sparks flying in the dim light as their weapons clashed. Both stood in their stirrups and hacked with a will but with little effect.

Then, as his horse, unaccustomed to such encounters, shied widely, Sir Gilbert received a buffet on the side of the head which sent him tumbling headlong. Luckily he was close enough to catch Robert around the middle as he fell and drag him to earth also.

Unhurt, both men leaped to their feet and resumed the conflict.

Dorothy, apparently unconcerned, also dismounted and stood outside the range of conflict, leaning on her sheathed blade.

The lurid light glinted on the armor and straining eyes of the combatants as they shifted ground, their spurred heels cutting the sward into shreds and sending up little puffs of dust.

Quickly it was borne upon Gilbert that he was no match for this demon in black. Again and again he just managed to evade a thrust or slash from the five-foot blade.

But he always claimed it was dew on the grass which brought his defeat. At any rate Robert feinted for the head, reversed, and, as his opponent staggered wildly in an effort to meet the new form of attack, drove his blade through the left shoulder. In the fading light the wound looked heart-high, but in fact it was not fatal, due to the fact that Gilbert had been almost on one knee when struck.

WITHOUT EMOTION Robert looked at his fallen foe and wiped his sword carefully on a handful of grass.

"I regret very much, my lady, that you should see this dirty work," he said, drawing his poniard, "but one needs must finish a task thoroughly. The var-

let's throat wants slitting. If you will turn your face away . . ."

He did not finish. Leaping forward, Dorothy struck him across the face with the Spanish blade.

"Have at thee, Black Robin!" she cried. "He who can not finish his work without a dagger had best hide himself in hell."

Robert laughed loud and long. "How now, my lady? Wouldst match thyself with the greatest swordsman in all France? But how the devil," he cried, his voice changing, "did you come by my uncle's sword?"

Without reply the girl lunged, the point of the rapier aimed straight at his heart.

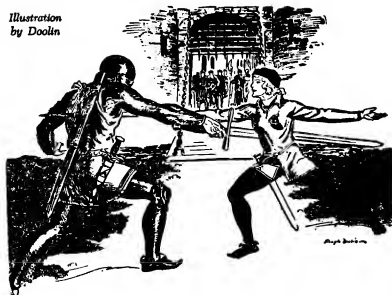
Although off guard, Robert managed to deflect the blade with the hilt of his sword, receiving only a scratch.

"Well taught," cried the girl, her voice shrill with the joy of battle. "Now try this one!" She went from carte to tierce and when he parried widely returned to carte again. But Robert was too quick. She only pinked him.

"Splendid!" she jeered. "Duke Florian taught you well when as a boy he loved you and your black curly hair. Remember those long hours of practise in the courtyard. The duke trained you for a gallant life, Robin, but soon you will be worm-food the same as he.

"'Tis a pity you thought so much of your great sword that you would not take his advice

Illustration
by Doolin



and change it for a blade like this," she continued a little later. "See, you could have spitted me then had you a nimbler weapon." She leaped back and laughed at him.

Black Robert was perspiring and furious. Giving over his slashing tactics, he endeavored to match her fencing with lunges from his clumsy blade. Only his great strength made the thing possible, but he handled the twenty-pound sword as though it were a toy.

"Quick and brilliant, is it then?" cried the girl, leaping forward once more, a slim arm extended backward, the other

keeping her weapon vibrating like a humming-bird's wing. "Very well, my charming rascal. Quick and brilliant it shall be. Do you remember that time attack which the old duke tried to teach you, but which you were just a little too clumsy to master properly? Let us try that."

Seated on the red sward, just outside the circling feet, Gilbert stopped his effort to staunch his wound and watched.

Stung to madness by Dorothy's words, bleeding from half a dozen slight wounds, Robert fell into her trap. As she thrust and lunged he did not parry, but endeavored to time her at-

tack and deflect the point on the guard of his sword while his own point held steady to meet her as her body followed the lunge.

Then Gilbert saw a display of swordsmanship which in later days he delighted in telling of to his children and grandchildren. The speed with which the girl lunged was like that of light. Too late her adversary made that snap of the wrist which was supposed to catch the point. By a fraction of a second he lost. His blade flashed past her breast, never touching her, while her own went inside his guard and through him, heart-high and extended half a foot between his shoulder-blades.

Robert did not fall at once. He merely coughed slightly, and, as with a sharp tug Dorothy drew the blade away, a look of horror such as Gilbert had never seen in the eyes of man dawned on him.

"Who are you?" he whispered through a bloody foam which had crept to his lips. "Only one man in France could have done that to me—and he is dead." He swayed, but braced himself as he stared at her with eyes that started from their sockets. "Are you? You are . . ."

"Aye, Robin, thou ingrate, thou shouldst have taken warning," the girl answered softly, almost tenderly. "Did I not say I — would — return?"

Then, as the dying man, with his eyes still fastened upon her,

crumpled slowly to the ground, Dorothy laughed.

A great burst of laughter it was, higher-pitched but otherwise exactly similar to that which had made the dead Duke of Orthow famous throughout all France—mocking, debonair and unafraid of God or devil.

In the midst of that laugh Dorothy suddenly clutched her breast, reeled, flung out her sword to steady her. The frail metal bent into a bow against the sod—snapped . . . She fell face downward upon the dead body of her foe.

The sun, which had been a great red scimitar on the horizon, sank from view.

Gilbert staggered to his feet, his wound forgotten. Picking up the girl, he ran toward the open drawbridge.

Occupants of the castle, who had fought for places on the turrets to watch this strangest of battles, rushed out to meet him. As he fell fainting from loss of blood they caught the girl from his arms.

DOROTHY WAS NOT dead, although life fluttered within her as lightly as a butterfly's wing.

Even when Gilbert, his arm in a sling, was able to be up and about she lay, hardly breathing, staring at the ceiling of her chamber with great, dark eyes which seemed to be looking into far places and seeing unearthly things.

Gilbert watched over her day and night as she slowly gained strength. But it was not the daredevil hoyden who had ridden with him twice across France that finally returned to health.

Neither was it the fickle, soft girl, who at the beck and call of her mother had made tapestries or drawn mournful music from the harpsichord.

This was a woman, strange, quiet, unearthly beautiful, who in later days was the despair of painters — a woman who gave the impression of having seen things which the living should not know, and of having learned secrets which made existence somehow unimportant and a trifle ridiculous.

She never spoke to Gilbert of their adventures together, seldom spoke at all unless it was necessary, but showed a sweetness and steadfastness of character which endeared her to the nurses and in time to all Mecklenberg and Orthow.

History says she and Gilbert finally were married by the good Father Bellaire and that later she bore many strong sons.

But as he sat before the fire on winter evenings, stroking the head of one of his fine dogs or merely staring idly into the flames while his wife rested with crossed hands beside him, thinking of God knows what, Gilbert would sometimes feel bitter tears rising to his eyes. For, after all, she was not *his* Dorothy.

The Reckoning

After an early lead, Charles Willard Diffin was passed a few times — by Prilucik, Lafferty, Smith, and Andreyeff, in that order; but like the dog in his story, he had the last laugh. The final lineup reads: (1) *The Dog That Laughed*, by Charles Willard Diffin; (2) *The Leaden Ring*, by S. Baring-Gould; (3) tied between *Lazarus*, by Leonid Andreyeff and *The Monster of the Prophecy*, by Clark Ashton Smith; (4) *The Man Who Never Was*, by R. A. Lafferty; (5) *Night and Silence*, by Maurice Level; (6) *Ah, Sweet Youth*, by Pauline Kappel Prilucik; (7) *Mr. Octbur*, by Joseph Payne Brennan. The winner was better than a length ahead, but Andreyeff and Smith were within one point of making it a three-way tie for second place.

Dermod's Bane

by Robert E. Howard

(author of *Skulls in the Stars*, *The Vale of Lost Women*, etc.)

ROBERT E. HOWARD left a large mass of unpublished and incomplete mss. behind when he died in 1936, as well as a number of mss. either accepted or to be accepted by WEIRD TALES. When Farnsworth Wright ran the short science-fiction type novel, *Almúric*, in 1939 (May, June-July, August issues), it looked as if this was all there was. Nothing could have been farther from the truth. It was learned that the late Oscar J. Friend, onetime editor of THRILLING WONDER STORIES, then authors' agent, had a large box of Howard mss.; this was the buried treasure into which L. Sprague de Camp and others dipped to bring forth new or revised or "collaborated" Howard stories in the late 40s and the 50s. Again, it seemed as if all had been discovered, but there were many who felt that there was still more Howard material. Finally GLENN LORD uncovered a large box full of mss., and it was from this file that we located the long-missing mss. *Valley of the Lost*, which we ran in the Summer issue of STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES under the title, *The Secret of Lost Valley*. (An explanation of why the title had to be changed, and a reproduction of a letter to Howard from Harry Bates, along with page one of the mss., appears in this issue; no need to repeat it here.) As a result, a new surge of Howard material is beginning to appear, some of it retyped without alteration from REH's original mss., some of it revised, some of it "completed". The present story, like *The Vale of Lost Women*, is a Howard original. Why it was not accepted during his lifetime, we do not know — in fact, we do not know if it was submitted at all; we can suspect, though, that if Wright rejected it, that was because he felt that its tone was not that which WT readers wanted from Howard — and the Conan stories were most heavily demanded, even if a few readers expressed growing boredom with a steady diet of them. There were few non-Conan tales under the Howard byline in WT between the issues of December 1932 (*The Phoenix on the Sword*) and October 1936 (part three, conclusion, of *Red Nails*, appearing just after WT's obituary notice, which ran in the August-September issue).

IF YOUR HEART is sick in your breast and a blind black curtain of sorrow is between your brain and your eyes so that the very sunlight is pale and leprous — go to the city of Galway, in the county of the same name, in the province of Connaught, in the country of Ireland.

In the gray old City of Tribes as they call it, there is a dreamy soothing spell that is like enchantment, and if you are of Galway blood, no matter how far away, your grief will pass slowly from you like a dream, leaving only a sad sweet memory, like the scent of a dying rose. There is a mist of antiquity hovering over the old city which mingles with sorrow and makes one forget. Or you can go out into the blue Connaught hills and feel the salt sharp tang of the wind off the Atlantic, and life seems faint and far away, with all its sharp joys and bitter sorrows, and no more real than the shadows of the clouds which pass.

I came to Galway as a wounded beast crawls back to his lair in the hills. The city of my people broke upon my gaze for the first time, but it did not seem strange or foreign. It seemed like a homecoming to me, and with each day passing the land of my birth seemed farther and farther away and the land of my ancestor closer.

I came to Galway with an

aching heart. My twin sister, whom I loved as never I had loved anyone else, died; her going was swift and unexpected. It seemed to my mazed agony that one moment she was laughing beside me with her cheery smile and bright gray Irish eyes, and the next, the cold bitter grass was growing above her. Oh, my soul to God, not your Son alone endured crucifixion.

A black cloud like a shroud locked about me and in the dim borderland of madness I sat alone, tearless and speechless. My grandmother came to me at last, a great grim old woman, with hard haunted eyes that held all the woes of the Irish race.

"Let you go to Galway, lad. Let you go to the ould land. Maybe the sorrow of you will be drowned in the cold salt sea. Maybe the folk of Connaught can heal the wound that is on you . . ."

I went to Galway.

Well, the people were kind there — all those great old families, the Martins, the Lynchs, the Deanes, the Dorseys, the Blakes, the Kirowans — families of the fourteen great families who rule Galway.

Out on the hills and in the valleys I roved and talked with the kindly, quaint country folk, many of whom still spoke the good old Erse language which I could speak haltingly.

There, on a hill one night be-

fore a shepherd's fire I heard again the old legend of Dermot O'Connor. As the shepherd unfolded the terrible tale in his rich brogue, interlaced with many Gaelic phrases, I remembered that my grandmother had told me the tale when I was a child, but I had forgotten the most of it.

BRIEFLY THE story is this: there was a chief of the Clan na O'Connor and his name was Dermot, but people called him the Wolf. The O'Connors were kings in the old days, ruling Connaught with a hand of steel. They divided the rule of Ireland with the O'Briens in the South — Munster — and the O'Neills in the North — Ulster. With the O'Rourkes they fought the MacMurraughs of Leinster and it was Dermot MacMurrough, driven out of Ireland by the O'Connors, who brought in Strongbow and his Norman adventurers. When Earl Pembroke (whom men called Strongbow) landed in Ireland, Roderick O'Connor was king of Ireland in name and claim at least. And the clan O'Connor, fierce Celtic warriors that they were, kept up their struggle for freedom until at last their power was broken by a terrible Norman invasion. All honor to the O'Connors. In the old times my people fought under their banners—but each tree has a rotten root. Each great house has its black sheep.

Dermot O'Connor was the black sheep of his clan and a blacker one never lived.

His hand was against all men, even his own house. He was no chieftain, fighting to regain the crown of Erin or to free his people; he was a red-handed reaver and he preyed alike on Norman and Celt; he raided into The Pale and he carried torch and steel into Munster and Leinster. The O'Briens and the O'Carrolls had cause to curse him, and the O'Neills hunted him like a wolf.

He left a trail of blood and devastation wherever he rode and at last, his band dwindling from desertions and constant fighting, he alone remained, hiding in caves and hills, butchering lone travelers for the sheer lust of blood that was on him, and descending on lonely farmer's houses or shepherd's huts to commit atrocities on their womenfolk. He was a giant of a man and the legends make of him something inhuman and monstrous. It must be truth that he was strange and terrible in appearance.

But his end came at last. He murdered a youth of the Kirowan clan and the Kirowans rode out of the city of Galway with vengeance in their hearts. Sir Michael Kirowan met the marauder alone in the hills — Sir Michael, a direct ancestor of mine, whose very name I bear. Alone they fought with only the shuddering hills to witness that

terrible battle, till the clash of steel reached the ears of the rest of the clan who were riding hard and scouring the countryside.

They found Sir Michael badly wounded and Dermod O'Connor dying with a cleft shoulder bone and a ghastly wound in his breast. But such was their fury and hatred, that they flung a noose about the dying robber's neck and hanged him to a great tree on the edge of a cliff overlooking the sea.

"And," said my friend, the shepherd, stirring the fire, "the peasant folk still point out the tree and call it Dermod's Bane, after the Danish manner, and men have seen the great outlaw o' nights, and him gnashing his great tusches and spouting blood from shoulder and breast and swearin' all manner o' ill on the Kirowans and their blood for all time to come.

"And so, sir, let you not walk in the cliffs over the sea by night for you are of the blood he hates and the same name of the man who felled him is on you. For let you laugh if so be you will, but the ghost of Dermod O'Connor the Wolf is abroad o' dark night and the moon out of the sky, and him with his great black beard and ghastly eyes and boar tusches."

They pointed me out the tree, Dermod's Bane, and strangely like a gallows it looked, standing there as it had stood for

how many hundred years I do not know for men live long in Ireland and trees live longer. There were no other trees near and the cliff rose sheer from the sea for four hundred feet. Below was only the deep sinister blue of the waves, deep and dark, breaking on the cruel rocks.

I WALKED MUCH in the hills at night for when the silence of the darkness was on the world and no speech or noises of men to hold my thoughts, my sorrow was dark on my heart again and I walked on the hills where the stars seemed close and warm. And often my mazed brain wondered which star *she* was on, or if she had turned to a star.

One night the old, sharp agony returned unbearably. I rose from my bed — for I was staying at the time in a little mountain inn — and dressed and went into the hills. My temples throbbed and there was an unbearable weight about my heart. My dumb frozen soul shrieked up to God but I could not weep. I felt I must weep or go mad, for never a tear had passed my eyelids since . . .

Well, I walked on and on, how long or how far I do not know. The stars were hot and red and angry and gave me no comfort that night. At first I wanted to scream and howl and throw myself on the ground and tear the grass with my teeth.

Then that passed and I wandered as in a trance. There was no moon and in the dim starlight the hills and their trees loomed dark and strange. Over the summits I could see the great Atlantic lying like a dusky silver monster and I heard her faint roaring.

Something flitted in front of me and I thought it was a wolf; but there have been no wolves in Ireland for many and many a year. Again I saw the thing, a long low shadowy shape. I followed it mechanically. Now in front of me I saw a cliff overlooking the sea. On the cliff's edge was a single great tree that loomed up like a gibbet. I approached this.

Then in front of me, as I neared the tree, a vague mist hovered. A strange fear spread over me as I watched stupidly. A form became evident. Dim and silky, like a shred of moon-mist, but with an undoubted human shape. A face — I cried out!

A vague, sweet face floated before me, indistinct, mist like—yet I made out the shimmering mass of dark hair, the high pure forehead, the red curving lips—the serious soft gray eyes.

"Moir!" I cried in agony and rushed forward, my aching arms spread wide, my heart bursting in my bosom.

She floated away from me like a mist blown by a breeze; now she seemed to waver in space—

I felt myself staggering wildly on the very edge of the cliff, whither my blind rush had led me. As a man wakes from a dream I saw in one flashing instant the cruel rocks four hundred feet below, I heard the hungry lapping of the waves — as I felt myself falling forward I saw the vision, but now it was changed hideously. Great tusk like teeth gleamed ghoulishly through a matted black beard. Terrible eyes blazed under pent-house brows; blood flowed from a wound in the shoulder and a ghastly gash in the broad breast

...
"Dermod O'Connor!" I screamed, my hair bristling, "Avaunt, fiend out of hell . . ."

I SWAYED OUT for the fall I could not check, with death waiting four hundred feet below. Then a soft small hand closed on my wrist and I was drawn irresistably back. I fell, but back on the soft green grass at the lip of the cliff, not to the keen edged rocks and waiting sea below. Oh, I knew—I could not be wrong. The small hand was gone from my wrist, the hideous face gone from the cliff edge — but that grasp on my wrist that drew me back from my doom — how could I fail to recognize it? A thousand times had I felt the dear touch of that soft hand on my arm or in my own hand. Oh Moira, Moira, pulse of my heart, in life and in

death you were ever at my side.

And now for the first time I wept and lying on my stomach with my face in my hands, I poured my racked heart out in scalding, blinding and soul easing tears, until the sun came up over the blue Galway hills and limned the branches of Dermod's Bane with a strange new radiance.

Now, did I dream or was I mad? Did in truth, the ghost of that long dead outlaw lead me across the hills to the cliff under the death-tree, and there assume the shape of my dead sister to lure me to my doom? And did

in truth the real hand of that dead sister, brought suddenly to my side by my peril, hold me back from death?

Believe or disbelieve as you will; to me it is a fact. I saw Dermod O'Connor that night and he led me over the cliff, and the soft hand of Moira Kirowan dragged me back and its touch loosened the frozen channels of my heart and brought me peace. For the wall that bars the living from the dead is but a thin veil, I know now, and so sure as a dead woman's love conquered a dead man's hate, so sure shall I some day in the world beyond, hold my sister in my arms again.

The Editor's Page

"Page" is a euphemism; it's barely one-third of a page. But the only way we could fit the issue together this time, due to the extra length of the feature story, was to omit our own lengthy comments and the letter section. *It Is Written* has not been discontinued, and won't be so long as you continue to write comments to me. However, I promised that letters would not be run at the expense of crowding out a story — and that is the only way they could have been squeezed in this time.

I think you'll find the announcement page of interest. Many have asked for this story. And for the benefit of the curious — this is *not* an early version of a later novel.

The Spell Of The Sword

by Frank Aubrey

INTRODUCTION

by Sam Moskowitz

THE MYTH OF the magic sword dates back to antiquity. Every school child knows that King Arthur established his right to the throne by drawing from a rock the famed sword *Excalibur*. To-day, the legend still persists in the adventure strip Prince Valiant, whose *Singing Sword* is effective only for him.

The theme has become part of literature and the mystique of the charmed sword has spilled over onto other weapons — the battle-ax Bretwalda of Philip Ketchum's popular series of the late forties in *ARGOSY*, for one.

The Spell of the Sword by Frank Aubrey is of multiple interest to followers of fantasy. It is the opposite of the Arthurian Legend since the enchanted sword it tells of inspires each of its owners to death and evil, with its hand grip wrought from silver in the form

of a human skull. The appearance of the story in PEARSON'S MAGAZINE, February, 1898, was only a year after the author's best-selling lost-race novel *The Devil Tree of El Dorado* (Hutchinson & Company, London) had made him a hot fiction find for any popular periodical.

The Devil Tree of El Dorado was inspired by the elevated plateau in South America called Roraima. At the time of the book's appearance, no one had ever ascended the 2,000-foot precipice leading to it and in his introduction to the book, Frank Aubrey made an impassioned plea for Great Britain to annex it as part of British Guiana before Venezuela, whose border it straddled, claimed it.

Aubrey felt that plant and animal life might have remained unaltered for hundreds of thousands, possibly millions of years on the Roraima plateau and the scientific discoveries of incalculable worth might be found there. He suggested that the logical way to find out was to ascend in a balloon.

Time has been unkind to Frank Aubrey. Venezuela *did* annex the Roraima. No incredible scientific discoveries have been made on its surface, but Aubrey's speculations in the introduction to his book served as superb appetizers for the speculations that followed, including the ancient, man-eating plant worshipped and feared by the natives of that South American sky land.

Aubrey went on to write others in the same vein including *A Queen of Atlantis* (1899) and *King of the Dead* (1903), the latter a frantically sought-after item by lost-race story collectors, even though rumor has it that it is not a lost-race novel at all!

Before World War I, three very popular teen-age science fiction novels appeared under the by-line of Fenton Ash: *The Radium Seekers* (1905), *A Trip to Mars* (1909) and *By Airship to Ophir* (1911). The most successful of the series was *A Trip to Mars*, handsomely illustrated in full-color and containing a preface which expressed the hope that the book might educate as well as entertain.

The Devil Tree of El Dorado is to the man-eating plant genre what *Dracula* is to the vampire concept. Like *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers, it is one of the most common rare books in existence, having passed through innumerable editions. *A Trip to Mars*, also not-too-difficult to obtain, has gained in stature as an early interplanetary novel well worth collecting.

No connection between Frank Aubrey and Fenton Ash was suspected until British science fiction author, Arthur Sellings, wrote to a fan magazine that he had incontrovertible evidence that the two authors were one and the same. As if to save him the necessity of producing it, Richard Witter, proprietor of F and S F Book Co.,

Staten Island, N. Y., in his Summer, 1966 catalogue of books offered for sale, offered a copy of *The Devil Tree of El Dorado* for \$10 which contained an inscription by Fenton Ash, asserting that he was Frank Aubrey.

To round out the story, Stanley A. Pachon in a serial article title *Pseudonyms in Popular Literature* in DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP, February, 1959 stated: "Frank Aubrey, pseudonym of F. Atkins who wrote for the ARGOSEY." It should be noted that Frank Aubrey, Fenton Ash and F. Atkins all have one thing in common: the initials of all three are F. A. Since Frank Aubrey's novel *A Queen of Atlantis* was serialized in the ARGOSEY in seven installments, beginning in February, 1899, the probability that he wrote for that magazine under the name of F. Atkins is considerably strengthened. Of course, it still has not been ascertained which of the three names, if any, is his real name.

Because of the foregoing, *The Spell of the Sword* becomes a collector's item of considerable importance: a Frank Aubrey fantasy that, so far as anyone knows, has never been reprinted until now. It is also further evidence that the man preferred to write fiction that involved science fiction and supernatural themes and therefore deserves to be remembered as one of the "in" authors by fantasy fans, when collecting landmarks in the literature.



"YES, IT IS a curious-looking ornament, isn't it? And it has a curious history, too — at least, the sword had of which it once formed part," observed Clayton, with a gravity that was somewhat unusual with him.

"Tell me about it," I said. I am not inquisitive, as a rule; but, somehow, his manner impressed me.

He remained silent a short time. Then, looking at me very earnestly, he answered:

"Well, perhaps I may; though

I would not tell it to many. Indeed, only two other people know the story. I hate — ah! more than I can convey to you — even to think about it. But to you it may be of special interest, for you are not one of those who thoughtlessly laugh at that which is out of the common, merely because it cannot be explained on ordinary grounds."

I began to grow interested. I scented something savoring of the mysterious, the supernatural. However, I replied quietly:

"You know that I regard all such matters from the point of view of a simple, unbiased inquirer. If one cannot always explain, one need not therefore ridicule."

"Just so, just so," he returned gloomily; and then lapsed into silence again. I said nothing; only pulled at my cigar, and patiently waited for what I saw was coming.

"Do you know — but no, of course you don't," he began presently. "But can you imagine how it can be, that a man may suddenly, unexpectedly, once in his life, feel like a would-be murderer? You have heard of men in the East who suddenly run 'amok,' as it is called? Well — what would you say if I tell you that — *I even I* — who sit now so soberly before you, whom you know to be ordinarily, a quiet, peaceably-disposed English gentleman — had once been on the very verge of running 'amok'?"

"Temporary frenzy — a heat-stroke, probably," I suggested.

"You think so, *now*; but wait till you've heard my story. Then you'll be better able to judge." And he proceeded to unfold to me the following strange tale:

"WHEN I SAID, just now, that I knew the history of the sword to which that curiously-wrought silver death's-head belonged, I meant only its history since it came into the hands of

a friend of mine named Knebworth. I suspect that many other histories or stories — and terrible ones — attach to it, if we could but trace them. But what I have to tell is quite gruesome enough, and I have no wish to learn anything more about it.

"You have heard that I fought in the Brazilian civil war of some years back. My friend, Jack Knebworth, and myself, attached ourselves to the popular — and winning — party.

"We were given commissions, and fought almost side-by-side through nearly the whole term of the war.

"It was just before the close of the last campaign that I one day found Jack in possession of that sword. It had the most curiously worked hilt I ever saw; and that death's-head was fixed on to the end by a screw. You see, there are two emeralds in the eye-sockets of the skull. They are dull now; they seem, somehow, to have lost their lustre; but, I tell you, their brightness formerly was something little short of marvellous. I have been told they are not very valuable, being scarcely, I believe, strictly speaking, emeralds at all. Some other stones of a similar color, perhaps. Anyway, they used to throw out greenish-yellow beams of so vivid and fiery a character that the thing made you sometimes jump when you looked at it. These beams, with the grinning jaws, gave the whole affair

a most ghastly, yet strangely fascinating appearance — you almost thought it was alive, and was grinning and rolling its eyes at you!

"The rest of the hilt was curiously worked out with strange woods inlaid with silver, upon which were signs, or letters, or designs of which I could not guess the meaning. The blade was an old-fashioned rapier, of wonderfully tempered steel; and this also had on its four faces signs or characters which no one, however, professed to understand. There was a scabbard of leather, mounted with soft black velvet and silver; the latter with similar markings. It was probably of ancient Spanish manufacture; that was all we could guess at. Knebworth bought it of an Indian chief, we knew, who, one day, came into the camp, and offered it at a ridiculously low price. That was all he could tell about it at that time.

"Well, two or three days after he bought it, his servant, a staunch, trustworthy old soldier, who had served him faithfully, and fought bravely, all through the war, 'ran amok,' as they say in India — I don't know how else to describe the affair — killed two of his own comrades, and then threw himself over a bridge into a mountain torrent, where he was dashed to pieces on the rocks. In one of the victims he left this sword; and, after the

inquiry, it was returned to Knebworth.

"Then came the peace; and we were moved into one of the towns. There Jack obtained another servant; one strongly recommended by a brother officer who was packing up to leave the country. Two days afterwards, this new servant disappeared; but, in one of the side streets, a man was found lying dead, with a wound through the heart; and, beside him, this sword! There was more fuss this time, and it was well for my chum that he could show a very clear and unassailable *alibi*. As it was, he had much trouble about the affair; and by the time it was over I was packing up and was nearly ready for my journey back to England. Knebworth was returning to the old country too, but not just then; he wished first to make a trip upon some matter of private business into the interior. He promised to follow me as soon as he could; and to look me up in London.

"Entering his room one day, I found him sitting on a packing-case with the sword lying across his knees. He told me he thought the thing was 'uncanny,' and that he was about to break it and throw the pieces away. After some talk I induced him to give it to me; I procured some sacking, and wrapped it up then and there, ready to pack in one of my chests. And that's how

the thing came into my possession.

"I CAME BACK to England full of hope and expectations of happiness: for I was hastening to return to one I dearly loved, one who had long ago promised to be my wife. Her name was Mabel — Mabel Karlake — and she had been all the world to me for many long years. True, I had not heard from her of late; but I attributed that to the disorganized state of the country while the war was about. But alas! when I arrived here, I soon found that this silence had a different, and, for me, a more sinister, meaning; she was engaged to another; and that one, an old college friend of mine!

"That was a terrible blow! I do not wish to dwell upon it; it is best passed over; but for weeks — months — I lived in a sort of dazed condition, as one who has been stunned and has never fully recovered from the shock. It is a dreadful experience for any man to have to face such a thing. The terrible sense of loneliness that falls upon you as you realize that you have come back, not to the world you know, but to one that is new and altogether strange, where everybody is interested in himself and his own affairs alone; and you are — an outsider, a stranger!

"And then, above all, to be deserted by the one being you

had believed would be true to you through everything; by the one you had lived for, worked for, fought for, risked your life for, again and again. Ah! think of it! But — let it pass. I go on now to other matters.

"I had taken some rooms in London, in Fitzroy Street. They were large, lofty, roomy apartments of the kind let out to artists as studios. They were, in fact, used for that purpose by an artist who was away for the summer and who was desirous of making a few pounds by letting them during his absence. I liked them better than the ordinary stuffy London lodgings; for, if poorly furnished and rather rough, they were airy, and there was plenty of room to move about, even after I had placed in them all my packages. Many of these I had never even taken the trouble to open since my return, so listless and miserable was my state of mind.

"I received a letter from Knebworth, written at Rio, saying he had nearly finished his business, and would come to England by the next boat. This letter contained a rather curious paragraph, which ran thus: 'By the way, I have a message for you from Macolo, the old Indian from whom I bought that unlucky ancient sword you took away with you. The beggar had been playing double, it seems; he got into mischief, and I was able to do him a good turn —

about saved his life. By way of showing his appreciation, the rascal confessed that he sold the weapon to me in the hope that it would get *me* into trouble — as it most certainly did. Now, he wants it back again, and offers quite a big sum for it.

"When I told him you had taken it away, he looked very anxious, said he had always liked you, and did not wish to bring you to harm. "Therefore," he said, "tell your white brother to avoid the sword as he would a rattlesnake. Tell him on no account to take the handle in his hand. There is a curse upon it; and those who come under its spell become lost." He did not use exactly those words, but that's the sum and substance of his information. Cheerful news, isn't it? Did I not say the thing was uncanny? In all seriousness, however, if you send the beastly thing back to him, he promises you "much gold" for it.

"I smiled languidly at the strange message, and thought no more of it at the time. Later I had a note from Knebworth, saying he had arrived at Southampton; then one saying he was at Croydon. Finally, came a postcard, announcing that he would call upon me the following afternoon.

"NOW, THAT SAME afternoon, I was expecting a visit from Cyril Bellingham — the man who had won Mabel from me. He

came to call upon me sometimes. I cannot say I was glad to see him; but he was, as I have told you, a college friend, and I did not like to appear so mean as to break off an old friendship because of what had occurred. Indeed, I was inclined to blame *her* rather than him; especially after the one interview I had with her. Her behavior then had seemed to me strange, inexplicable; her replies to my impassioned words were cold and stinging. Yet in her eyes was an expression I could not fathom. It seemed a mixture; there appeared to be doubt, surprise, and a look as of half fear, mingled with a sort of pathetic pity for myself. This last was so evident that I had no heart to upbraid her; and I left her without one word of reproach for what she had caused me to suffer.

"Jack Knebworth's expected visit had put me in mind, as I sat expecting him and Bellingham, of the old sword that lay packed away in one of my chests, but which belonged, properly, to him. I decided I would give it back to him, and let him do with it what seemed good in his own eyes. I therefore opened the chest, and began pulling out the contents till I found it wrapped in the sacking in which I had tied it up.

"Amongst other things I discovered, before coming to it, were two fencing foils, which were very old friends; I had had

them many years. I laid these on the floor, took out the sword, and went and sat down by the table to undo the wrapper at my leisure. Soon the curious old rapier was unfolded, and I drew it from its scabbard to see if it had rusted. I found it quite bright; and, then, as my glance fell upon the hilt and the death's-head, I gave a great start. Never have I seen in any stones such gleams of lurid light as those that danced, and sparkled, and darted from the two eyes of that skull! I say 'lurid,' for, at times, the stones seemed to change to rubies and the scintillations took a blood red hue, changing quickly again to a glittering green.

"As I gazed, the baleful glare of those fiery eyes seemed to grow and grow in intensity, and the eyes themselves to increase in size, till I felt as though I were enduring the mocking gaze of a mighty demon; and, verily, I half expected each moment to see appear before me some appalling, devilish shape from the under world. I took hold of the hilt with a half-conscious determination to see whether the thing were really alive; and also, as I believe, with the vague wish to shut out the sight of the hideous skull and its rolling, leering eyes.

"AS MY HAND closed upon it, I felt at once an odd tingling in the fingers, that was not, how-

ever, at all unpleasant. Gradually it increased, and crept up my arm, and it seemed to bring a sensation as of great strength and power. I began to brandish the weapon, and to make lunges at an imaginary foe, thinking how easy it would be to bear down his guard, or wear out his defence, with such nerve and vigour as had suddenly come into the muscles of my arm.

"Then my thoughts took a fresh turn. I thought of Bellingham, and, for the first time, I felt towards him a herce anger. *'He has stolen your loved one from you'* seemed to be whispered into my ear. *'He has taken from you all you had worked for, striven for, risked your life for. There is, perhaps, treachery at the root of it all. Kill him, kill him, KILL HIM! rid yourself and your loved one of him; then the road to happiness will lie open before you.'* And—God help me!—I listened to it all! I madly resolved I would kill my rival when he came in; and I knew that he might arrive at any moment.

"Meanwhile, the queer sensation grew till it had permeated my whole frame. I felt full of a rich, warm glow, that tingled and rushed through my veins like a fiery flood, and that seemed to give me the strength of a dozen men. Then I began to fancy I heard strange sounds — murmurings and voices; the room rocked and swayed, and

one of its walls — that on my left — opened, and there, spread out before my eyes, I saw a wonderful scene. From the floor on which I stood I looked out on a wide tropical landscape — a great stretch of rolling pampas, that ended, in the distance, in a range of blue mountains.

"On each side, in long ranks, were numbers of people of almost all nations, dressed in the strangest garbs — costumes, for the most part, of those who had been dead and gone, for hundreds and hundreds of years. Some were men in flowing robes of various hues and shapes — Moors, Saracens, Arabs; many were in flashing armour or coats of mail; while others, again, were like unto the Incas and the priests of ancient South America. Mingled with them were Spaniards, Portuguese, Indians of many tribes; and some, again, of later times; even a few were of today. Never, not even on the stage in wildest pantomime, have I seen such a motley throng.

"Those on the left were grim, hard-visaged beings who gazed at me with an expression that was half-friendly, half-mocking. Their looks, however, filled me with aversion; for somehow, it was borne in on me that their friendliness was more to be dreaded than their most terrible enmity. They were nearly all men; though amongst them were a few women; and each held a

sword — the exact counterpart of the one that was in my own hand! The figures on the right carried no swords; but here, each one showed some ghastly wound, apparently still fresh and bleeding. And there came upon me the knowledge that all these I saw before me were the forms of the wicked or unhappy beings who had fallen under the spell of the sword; those to the right being the victims, and those to the left their murderers.

"FOR A WHILE we gazed at each other in silence, I looking from one to the other in ever-increasing wonder and awe. Then those that carried the swords, lifted them in the air towards me as in salute, and, at the same time, began a strange, wild singing or chanting, the words being sung first by a few, and then repeated by the remainder:

"*'Haill Brother of the Sword'* was chanted by the first singers.

"*'Haill Brother of the Sword'* came the response, so deep-toned and sonorous that it resembled a great wave that travels from afar, and falls, with its deep diapason, as from some grand ocean of sound, thundering upon the shore, rather than the melody of human voices.

"*'He is one of us'* was next chanted forth; and *'He is one of us'* came the deep response.

"But at this a great horror seized me; a feeling of loathing and repulsion of these weird figures. 'One of them? No! *That* I would never be.' And as these thoughts rushed through my mind, I tried fiercely to loose my grasp upon the fatal sword, and to cast it from me. But I could not; try as I would, I found myself utterly unable to let it go. And the figures before me, as though they read my thoughts and answered them, sang again; but this time there was a sound of mockery in their tones: '*He who takes up the sword cannot loose it! It is the spell of the Sword!*' And the words were repeated, as the others had been.

"Still, however, I strove; I wrestled and fought strenuously against the dread power that kept the sword in my hand. Seeing this, the figures, as by one accord, lifted their swords, and pointed to the wall of the rooms in front of me. As I turned in the direction thus indicated, the wall there opened also, and I seemed to see the Mall in St. James's Park, and, walking towards me, my rival, Cyril Bellingham. He appeared to be looking at me; but I *knew* that, though he was *thinking* of me, he did not really see me. And, on his face, was an expression of such insolent triumph as stung me to fury again as I gazed. At once the voices chanted: '*He sees his enemy. He will kill him!*'

"But even as the sound of the response died away, the wall on my right hand opened, and there, gazing at me with a look of indescribable anguish and intreaty, I saw the face of Mabel — of my dear lost love.

"'*Shall the one I loved—and love still—become a murderer?*' it seemed to say. I almost heard the whisper from the loved lips; and it fired me with sudden strength and resolve to throw off the spell.

"'*No! A thousand times No!*' I cried resolutely. With my left hand I seized the blade, and, with a desperate effort, wrenched the hilt out of my right, and the sword fell with a clatter, on the floor. Then the voices burst out into mocking laughter.

"'*He thinks to escape! But the sword shall be turned against him!*' they cried.

"But the sound grew dim, and soon died away in a low wail; the room rocked and swayed around and under me, the figures faded slowly from my sight, and the walls seemed to return to their places.

"THEN, TREMBLING, and feeling strangely weak, I went over to a sideboard, poured out a glass of brandy, drank it off, and dropped into a large arm-chair that was near. There I must either have fainted or fallen asleep, for I remember nothing more till I seemed to wake up suddenly and say Cyril Bell-

ingham standing before me. He was looking at me with the same cynical, triumphant smile that had so exasperated me a short time before. But it vanished as he saw me rouse up; and in its place came the usual look of cordial friendship.

"Having forty winks, eh?" he said, with a short laugh. "What in the world are you doing with all these playthings scattered about?" He indicated the foils and the sword, and, picking up the latter, he laid it on the table.

"I watched the action in silence, and, until I saw him put the weapon down, I made no reply. Then I said I felt tired, and out of sorts, and supposed that I had fallen asleep.

"I have something to tell you," he went on, regarding me curiously. "Mabel has been so good as to fix the happy day. We are to be married this day month. I want to know if you will be one of my groomsmen?"

"This was, I need not say, cruelly trying to me; but I still felt tired and listless, and only answered quietly:

"Thank you, but I shall not be in London. I am going away with Jack Knebworth. He is coming here this afternoon to arrange about it."

"Ah! Mabel will be sorry," he returned, but, I could see, with evident relief. Then he took up the sword, and began bending it with the point on the floor.

"Now, by that time, I had per-

suaded myself that I must have fallen asleep, and dreamed all that I have just told you. Therefore I did not trouble myself about his handling the thing. I rather welcomed it as a ready way of changing the conversation.

"It's good steel," he went on.

"I picked up one of the foils, and bent it as he was bending the sword.

"Not better than this," I said indifferently.

"Ah, I remember those foils," he replied. "You and I had many a bout with them years ago. hadn't we? I think I used to be the better fencer in those days. I wonder if I am so still?"

"I've learned more of fencing than I knew then," I told him. "And in a hard school too — where either you or your antagonist has to 'curl up,' as the Americans call it; and — it was not I that went under as you can see," I finished rather grimly.

"H'm. Well that may be a good thing for you," he answered musingly, "because —"

"Because what?" I asked, as he seemed to hesitate.

"Because it's your only chance," he exclaimed, suddenly springing up and lunging at me with the weapon he was holding. "I mean to *kill* you!"

"IT WAS fortunate for me that I held the foil in my hand; and still more fortunate that I

was looking at him at the moment; otherwise the weapon would have passed through my heart. Something in his manner, however, had put me on the alert; and I parried the stroke.

"Great Heavens, Bellingham! What on earth's the matter with you? What are you thinking of?" I cried. "Are you suddenly mad?"

"Aye," he shouted, lunging again, 'mad for your life! And I mean to have it too, as you will soon find out!'

"Again I parried the thrust, and stepped back, looking at him in horror and astonishment. Then I saw that his eyes seemed to be blazing; he looked literally, unmistakably, a madman.

"Suddenly, the truth flashed upon me. What I had experienced had been no dream; it had all been true! And now *he* was under the spell of the sword, as I had been but a short time before!

"For the love of heaven, Bellingham," I gasped out, 'throw that accursed sword down. Why should you wish to kill me?'

"Why," he hissed out, making at me again, 'because I know that Mabel loves you still. She has never loved *me*. I told her lies about you — said you had a Creole wife and three children out in Brazil; showed her letters that made her believe it. And she *did* believe it — ha, ha! And became engaged to me. But I know she loves you all the time

—and *that's* why I mean to kill you!'

"Great God!" I burst out. "You infernal scoundrell! But — why do you tell me all this?"

"Why do I tell you, fool?" he almost screamed. 'Because I mean to kill you. You will never leave this room alive! Today I feel I have the strength of ten men — aye, of fifty! All your boasted swordsmanship will avail you nothing today, for I shall *kill* you. But I want you to die knowing that, had you lived, you could have won back Mabel from me. As it *is*, you will die with the knowledge that she will be *mine*.

"He got all this out in incoherent gasps, attacking me fiercely the while; and I saw it was no time for reply or for bandying words. It was all I could do, in this one-sided encounter, to defend myself. As he had nothing to fear from my weapon, all the advantage, of course, lay on his side. He had no necessity to defend himself; all he needed to do was to try to pass my guards, or to tire me out.

"And when I remembered the feelings I had experienced while grasping that diabolical sword, my heart sank within me. I recalled the strange sensation of wonderful strength and vigour; my conviction that I could prevail against any, even the strongest, opponent. And now all that mysterious force and power were turned against myself — against

me, when I had but a foil to defend myself with, and at the moment, too, when life seemed sweeter than ever it had before — when I knew that Mabel loved me!

"This thought nerved me to fight hard for my life; but it could not give me the advantage my antagonist held; nor equalize the chances. Still, I fought desperately. Round and round the studio — there was no table in the middle — to and fro — backwards and forwards, we went; sometimes stopping as by mutual consent, for a moment's breathing space, when we would stand and glare at one another like furious, watchful tigers. But, in the end, I knew my strength was gradually failing me. I felt a wild, mad despair creeping over me — the feeling of one struggling hopelessly in the toils and knowing he can, at best, only stave off death for a few moments longer.

"TWICE, BELLINGHAM, with a fierce, almost irresistible beat, nearly forced the foil out of my aching hand. I knew the end was near; I felt sick and staggered, when the door opened, and Jack Knebworth entered. He looked, in open-eyed astonishment, for a second, then, taking in the whole situation in that brief glance, he raised a heavy walking-stick he was carrying, and, with one slashing blow, knocked the sword

out of Bellingham's hand. It was just in time; for Bellingham had seen him, and, expecting that he would interfere, evidently determined to finish me off first. He threw himself forward with his whole power, and, as his weapon was knocked up, he came on to the button of my foil with such force that it snapped off near the end, and the jagged blade entered his breast. He fell to the ground with a mad yell of disappointed fury, and then lay still, the blood flowing from the wound.

"I rested, panting, against the wall, and stared at Knebworth, who stared back at me.

"'Well!' he exclaimed, 'this is a pretty business, truly! Lucky for you I came in when I did.'

"'Lucky, indeed, old friend! Give me a drop of that brandy over there. Is he badly hurt — dead, do you think?'

"'What does it matter?' he returned coolly, as he poured out the brandy. 'The infernal, murdering villain! To set on, with a sword, against a man armed only with a foil!'

"'Ah! there's worse than that at the bottom of it all,' I said savagely. 'Deceit, treachery, devilry! But I'll tell you another time. What's to be done now?'

"'Go for a doctor,' he said, and bring one as soon as you can; I'll see what I can do for him meanwhile. But first we'll have no more devil's tricks with this cursed plaything.' And, with

that, he picked up the fatal sword, broke it into several parts over his knee, and threw all the pieces into the chest, shutting down the lid.

"Now, remember," he went on, looking meaningly at me, "you were fencing, in a friendly way, with those two foils; and there was an accident. I happened to see it, and can give all necessary explanations."

"I gave him a nod of comprehension and assent, and hurried away for a medical man. Later on, Bellingham was carried, still unconscious, to the nearest hospital. His wound was a bad one; and for long it was not known whether he would live or die. In

the end, however, he recovered, and went abroad.

"I took no steps against him, but let him go. I felt too happy, and too well pleased with the world in general; for, by the time he was convalescent, Mabel and I were married.

"I unscrewed that death's-head from the hilt — handling it very gingerly the while, you may be sure — and, one day down at Brighton, Jack Knebworth and I threw all the rest of the weapon into the sea. We were determined that no other human creature should run even the faintest chance of coming under the influence of that terrible sword and its spell."



"Williamson"

by Henry S. Whitehead

(author of *Cassius*, *The Black Beast*)

HENRY ST. CLAIR WHITEHEAD died in 1932, and when August Derleth brought out the second collection of Whitehead stories (10 out of 17 from *WEIRD TALES* and *STRANGE TALES*,) he noted: "In this book for the first time in print anywhere appears Dr. Whitehead's remarkable tale, 'Williamson', which every editor who saw it shied away from publishing . . ." This is rather odd, because the theme itself is one that oldtime pulp editors seemed to have had a great fondness for — although actual publication of stories dealing with it was usually considered very daring. It will not be a surprise shocker to most readers, particularly those with experience in the field, and I really do not believe that the author was trying very hard to conceal the solution to the mystery. It is worked out well enough so that the reader will not consider the narrator, Canevin (who cannot be presumed to have read hundreds of weird stories magazines) an utter idiot — but may nonetheless congratulate himself on his own astuteness as seeing farther than the narrator. (This is one of the reasons why a "Watson" is a character who is a little slow on the uptake, though not necessarily a fool.) A century ago, the horror of the theme could strike far more effectively, because so many intelligent and educated people really considered it possible. All beside the point; we read supernatural-based fantasy for entertainment, not instruction; and there are still traces of the child who believes in magic in most of us, so that we can get an emotional charge out of that which intellect reminds us is nothing to worry about because it is impossible. In this story, then, it is the working out that counts; just when you'll catch on, I cannot predict — but then you'll want to know *how* the truth reveals itself. And perhaps it is the fact that Whitehead eschews melodrama, thus giving the tale a feeling of verisimilitude (which the usual story of this nature does not have), that most upset the editors who shied away from it.

THE DEATH OF Mr. Williamson Morley occurred in the early part of October, in San Francisco, only a couple of weeks before I was due to sail from New York for St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, my usual winter habitat. It was too far to get to the funeral, although, being an old friend and school mate of Morley's, I should have attended under any ordinary circumstances. I do not happen to know what the Morleys were doing in San Francisco. They lived in New York, and had a summer place on Long Island and I never knew Morley to move about very much. I wrote him at once, of course, a long and intimate letter. In it I suggested his coming down to stay with me in St. Thomas. I was there when I received his reply. He accepted, and said that he would be arriving about the middle of November and would cable me accordingly.

When he arrived he made quite a flutter among my negro house-servants; an impression, it seemed to me, that went much deeper, for some strange reason, than his five huge trunks of clothes would cause among such local dandies as my house-man, Stephen Penn. I am anything but "psychic," despite some experience with various out-of-the-way matters among the Caribbean Islands and in various parts of the globe. Indeed, one of my chief aversions is the use

of this word by anyone as applying to one's own character. But, "psychic" or not, I could not help but feel that flutter, as I have called it. Mr. Williamson Morley made a very striking impression indeed. I mention it because it recalled to me something I had entirely dropped out of my mind in the year or more since I had seen Sylvia, Morley's late wife. My servants, very obviously, showed an immediate, and inexplicable dread of him. I cannot, honestly, use a less emphatic word. When you notice your cook making the sign of the cross upon herself when she lays rolling, anxious eyes upon your house-guest, observe an unmistakable grayish tinge replacing the shining brown of your house-man's "Zambo" cheeks as he furtively watches that guest at his morning setting-up exercises which Morley performed with vigor and gusto—when you notice things like this, you can hardly help wondering what it is all about, especially when you remember that the late wife of that house-guest was as unmistakably afraid of her genial husband!

I had never known Sylvia very well, but I had known her well enough to realize that during Williamson Morley's courtship there was no such element of fear in her reception of his advances preliminary to a marriage. I tried, when I did notice this thing, beginning not long

after the wedding, not so much to explain it — I regarded it as inexplicable that anyone should have such feelings toward Morley whom I had known since we were small boys together in the same form at Berkeley School in New York City — as to classify it. I found that I could give it several names — dread, repulsion, even loathing.

It was too much for me. Williamson Morley inspiring any of these feelings, especially in the wife of his bosom! The thing, you see, was quite utterly ridiculous. There never was, there could not possibly be, a more kindly, normal, open-hearted and reasonable fellow than Morley himself. He was, and always had been, good-natured to the degree of a fault. He was the kind who would let anyone smack him in the face, and laugh at it, without even the thought of hitting back. He had always had a keen sense of humor. He was generous, and rich. He had inherited good-sized fortunes both from his father and mother, and had made a good deal more in his Wall Street office. Williamson Morley was what some people call "a catch," for any woman.

Knowing him as well as I did it seemed rather tough that his wife, whom he plainly loved, should take things the way she did. Morley never said anything about it, even to me. But I could see what certain novelists name

"the look of pain in his eyes" more than once.

Morley's good-nature, more like that of a friendly big dog than anything else I could compare it to, was proverbial. His treatment of his wife, in the six or seven years of their married life, a good deal of which I saw with my own eyes, was precisely what anyone who knew him very well would expect of him. Sylvia had been a comparatively poor girl. Married to Morley, she had everything a very rich man's petted darling could possibly desire. Morley indulged her, lavished upon her innumerable possessions, kindnesses, privileges . . .

And yet, through it all there ran that unmistakable note of a strange unease, of a certain suggestion of dread in his presence on Sylvia's part.

I put it down to perverseness pure and simple after seeing it for the first year or so. I wasn't doing any guessing, you see, about Morley's "inside" treatment of his wife. There was no bluff about the fellow, nothing whatever in the way of deceit or double-mindedness. I have seen him look at her with an expression which almost brought the tears into my eyes—a compound expression mingled out of respect and devotion, and puzzlement and a kind of dogged undertone as though he were saying, mentally, "All right, my dear, I've done all I know how

to make things go right and have you happy and contented, and I'm keeping it up indefinitely, hoping you'll see that I love you honestly, and would do anything in the world for you; and that I may find out what's wrong so that I can make it right."

THAT INVINCIBLE good-nature I have spoken of, that easy-going way of slipping along through life letting people smack you and not smacking them back which was always characteristic of Williamson Morley, was, I should hasten to make clear, not in the slightest degree due to any lack of ability on Morley's part to take care of himself, physically or otherwise. Quite the contrary! Morley had been, by far, our best athlete in school days. He held the interscholastic record for the twelve-pound shot and the twelve-pound hammer, records which, I believe, still stand. He was slow and a trifle awkward on his feet, it is true, but as a boxer and wrestler he was simply invincible. Our school trainer, Ernie Hjertberg, told me that he was the best junior athlete he had ever handled, and Ernie had a long and reputable record.

Morley went on with this in college. In fact, he became a celebrity, what with his succession of record-breaking puts of the sixteen-pound shot, and his tremendous heaves of the ham-

mer of the same weight. Those two events were firsts for Haverford whenever their star heavy-weight competed during his four years at that institution. He quit boxing after he had nearly killed the Yale man who was heavy-weight champ in Morley's Freshman year, in the first round. He was intercollegiate champion wrestler of all weights for three and one-half years. Watching him handle the best of them was like watching a mother put her baby to bed! Morley simply brushed aside all attempts to hammerlock or half-nelson him, took hold of his opponent, and put him on his back and held him there long enough to record the fall; and then got up with one of those deprecating smiles on his face as much as to say: "I hated to do that to you, old man—hope I didn't hurt you too much."

ALL THROUGH his athletic career at school, for the four years we were together there, he showed only one queer trait. That, under the circumstances, was a very striking one. Morley would never get under the show-ers. No. A dry-rub for him, every time. He was a hairy fellow, as many very powerfully-built men are, and I have seen him many a time, after some competition event or a strenuous workout at our athletic field or winter days in the gymnasium shining with honest sweat

so that he might have been lacquered! Nevertheless, no shower for Morley! Never anything but four or five dry towels, then the usual muscle-kneading and alcohol rub afterwards — invariably with his track or gym shoes on. That, in its way, was another, and the last, of Morley's peculiarities. From first to last, he never, to my knowledge, took off even for muscle-kneadings at the capable hands of Black Joe, our rubber, the shoes he had been wearing, nor, of course, the heavy woolen stockings he always wore under them.

When quizzed about his dry-rubs, Morley always answered with his unfailing good-nature, that it was a principle with him. He believed in the dry-rub. He avoided difficulty and criticism in this strange idea of his, as it seemed to the rest of us, because Ernie Hjertberg, whose word was law and whose opinions were gold and jewels to us boys, backed him up in it. Many of the older athletes, said Ernie, preferred the dry-rub, and a generation ago nobody would have thought of taking a shower after competition or a workout. So it became a settled affair that Williamson Morley should dry-rub himself while the rest of us revelled under our cascades of alternate hot and cold water and were cool and comfortable while Morley at least looked half-cooked, red, and uncomfortable after his plain towellings!

It was, too, entirely clear to the rest of us that Morley's dry-rubs were taken on principle. That he was a bather—at home—was entirely evident. He was, besides being by long odds the best-dressed fellow in a very dressy, rather "fashionable" New York City school, the very pink and perfection of cleanliness. Indeed, if it had not been for Morley's admirable disposition, self-restraint, and magnificent muscular development and his outstanding athletic pre-eminence among us — our football teams with Morley in were simply invincible, and his inordinately long arms made him unbeatable at tennis — the school would very likely have considered him a "dude." A shot-putter, if it had been anybody else than Morley, who, however modestly, displays a fresh manicure twice a week at the group-critical age of fifteen or sixteen is—well, it was Morley, and whatever Morley chose to do among our crowd, or, indeed any group of his age in New York City in those days, was something that called for respectful imitation—not adverse criticism. Morley set the fashion for New York's foremost school for the four or five years that he and I, Gerald Canevin, were buddies together.

It was when we were sixteen that the Morley divorce case shrieked from the front pages of the yellow newspapers for

the five weeks of its lurid course in the courts.

During that period I, who had been a constant visitor at the house on Madison Avenue where Williamson, an only son, lived with his parents, by some tacit sense of the fitness of things, refrained from dropping in Saturdays or after school hours. Subsequently, Mrs. Morley, who had lost the case, removed to an apartment on Riverside Drive. Williamson accompanied his mother, and Mr. Morley continued to occupy the former home.

IT WAS A long time afterwards, a year or more, before Williamson talked of his family affairs with me. When he did begin it, it came with a rush, as though he had wanted to speak about it to a close friend for a long time and had been keeping away from the topic for decency's sake. I gathered from what he said that his mother was in no way to blame. This was not merely "chivalry" on Williamson's part. He spoke reticently, but with a strong conviction. His father, it seemed, had always, as long as he could remember, been rather "mean" to the kindest, most generous and whole-souled lady God had ever made. The attitude of Morley senior, as I gathered it, without, of course, hearing that gentleman's side of the affair, had always been distant and somewhat

sarcastic, not only to Mrs. Morley but to Williamson as well. It was, Williamson said, as though his father had disliked him from birth, thought of him as a kind of inferior being! This had been shown, uniformly, by a general attitude of contemptuous indifference to both mother and son as far back as Williamson's recollection of his father took him.

It was, according to him, the more offensive and unjust on his father's part, because, not long before his own birth, his mother had undergone a more than ordinarily harrowing experience, which, Williamson and I agreed, should have made any man that called himself a man considerate to half the woman Mrs. Morley was, for the rest of his natural life!

The couple had, it appeared, been married about five years at the time, were as yet childless, and were living on the Island of Barbados in the Lower Caribbean. Their house was an estate-house, "in the country", but quite close-in to the capital town, Bridgetown. Quite nearby, in the very next estate-house, in fact, was an eccentric old fellow, who was a retired animal collector. Mr. Burgess, the neighbor, had been in the employ for many years before his retirement due to a bad clawing he had received in the wilds of Nepaul. of

the Hagenbecks and Wombwells.

Mr. Burgess' outstanding eccentricity was his devotion to "Billy," a full-grown orang-utan which, like the fellow in Kipling's horrible story, *Bimi*, he treated like a man, had it at the table with him, had taught the creature to smoke—all that sort of thing. The Negroes for miles around were in a state of sustained terror, Williamson said.

In fact, the *Bimi* story was nearly re-enacted there in Barbados, only with a somewhat different slant. We boys at school read Kipling, and *Sherlock Holmes*, and Alfred Henry Lewis' *Wolfville* series those days, and *Bimi* was invoked as familiar to us both when Williamson told me what had happened.

It seems that the orang-utan and Mrs. Morley were great friends. Old Burgess didn't like that very well, and Douglas Morley, Williamson's father, made a terrific to-do about it. He finally absolutely forbade his wife to go within a hundred yards of Burgess' place unless for the purpose of driving past!

Mrs. Morley was a sensible woman. She listened to her husband's warnings about the treachery of the great apes, and the danger she subjected herself to in such matters as handling the orang-utan a cigarette, and willingly enough agreed to keep entirely away from their neighbor's place so long as the beast

was maintained there at large and not, as Mr. Morley formally demanded of Burgess, shut up in an adequate cage. Mr. Morley even appealed to the law for the restraint of a dangerous wild beast, but could not, it appeared, secure the permanent caging of Burgess' strange pet.

Then, one night, coming home late from a Gentlemen's Party somewhere on the island, Mr. Morley had walked into his house and discovered his wife unconscious, lying on the floor of the dining-room, most of her clothing torn off her, and great weals and bruises all over her where the orang-utan had attacked her, sitting alone in a small living-room next the dining-room.

Mrs. Morley, hovering between life and death for days-on-end with a bad case of physiological shock, could give no account of what had occurred, beyond the startling apparition of "Billy" in the open doorway, and his leap towards her. She had mercifully lost consciousness, and it was a couple of weeks before she was able to do so much as speak.

Meanwhile Morley, losing no time, had dug out a couple of his Negroes from the estate-village, furnished them with hurricane-lanterns for light on a black and starless night, and, taking down his Martini-Henry elephant gun, and charging the magazine with explosive bullets, had gone out after the orang-

utan, and blown the creature, quite justifiably of course, into a mound of bloody pulp. He had, again almost justifiably, it seemed to Williamson and me, been restrained only by his two men disarming him lest he be hung by the neck until dead, from disposing of his neighbor, Burgess, with the last of the explosive cartridges. As it was, although Morley was not a man of any great physical force, being slightly built and always in somewhat precarious health, he had administered a chastising with his two hands to the fatuous ex-wild animal collector, which was long remembered in His Majesty King Edward's loyal colony of Barbados, B.W.I.

It was, as Williamson's maternal grandmother had confided to him, almost as though this horrible experience had unhinged Mr. Morley's mind. Williamson himself had been born within a year, and Douglas Morley, who had in the meantime sold out the sugar estates in which most of his own and his young wife's money had been invested, had removed to New York where he instituted a Bond Brokerage business. This Williamson had inherited two years after his graduation from college, at the time of his father's death at the rather premature age of forty-seven.

Douglas Morley, according to his grandmother's report and his own experience, had includ-

ed his son in the strange attitude of dislike and contemptuous indifference which the devastating experience with the orang-utan had seemed to bring into existence.

We were not out of school when Mrs. Douglas Morley died, and Williamson went back to the Madison Avenue house to live with his father.

Mr. Morley had a kind of apartment built in for him, quite separate from his own part of the house. He could not, it seemed, bear to have Williamson under his eye, even though his plain duty and ordinary usage and custom made it incumbent on him to share his home with his son. The two of them saw each other as little as possible. Williamson had inherited his mother's property, and this his father administered for him as I must record to his credit, in an admirably competent and painstaking manner, so that Williamson was already a rich man well before his father's death about doubled his material possessions.

I HAVE GONE into this detail largely because I want to accentuate how extremely regrettable, it seemed to me, was Sylvia's unaccountable attitude, which I have described, to one of the best and kindest fellows on Earth, after a childhood and youth such as he had been subjected to because of some ob-

scure psychological slant of a very odd fish of a father for which, of course, he was in no way responsible himself.

Well, now Sylvia was gone, too, and Williamson Morley was once more alone in the world so far as the possession of near relatives went, and free to do about as he pleased.

His one comment, now that he was presumably settled down with me for the winter, about his late wife, I mean, was a very simple one, unconnected with anything that had been said or even alluded to, in answer to my carefully-phrased first personal word of regret for his loss.

"I did everything I knew how, Gerald."

There was a world of meaning, a resume of quiet suffering, patiently and, I am sure, bravely, borne in those few and simple words so characteristic of Williamson Morley.

He did, once, refer to his mother during his visit with me, which lasted for several months. It was apropos of his asking my help in classifying and arranging a briefcase full of papers, legal and otherwise, which he had brought along, the documentation connected with a final settlement of his financial affairs. He had disposed of his bond-brokerage business immediately after his wife's death.

There were various family records — wills, and suchlike — among these papers, and I noted

among these as I sorted and helped arrange them for Morley, sitting opposite him at the big table on my West gallery, the recurring names of various kinsfolk of his — Parkers, Morleys, Graves, Putneys — but a total absence of the family name Williamson. I had asked him, without any particular purpose, hardly even curiosity over so small a matter, whether there were not some Williamson relatives, that being his own baptismal name.

"That's a curious thing, Gerald," said Morley, reflectively, in his peculiarly deep and mellow voice. "My poor mother always — well, simply *abominated* the name. I suppose that's howcome I got it fastened on me—because she disliked it! You see, when I was born—it was in New York, in Roosevelt Hospital—my mother very nearly died. She was not a very big or strong person, and I was—er—rather a good-sized baby — weighed seventeen pounds or something outrageous at birth! Queer thing too — I nearly passed out during the first few days myself, they say! Undernourished. Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it. Yet, that was the verdict of three of New York's foremost obstetricians who were in on the case in consultation.

"Well, it seems, when I was about ten days old, and out of danger, my father came around in his car—it was a Winton, I believe in those days or perhaps, a Panhard—and carted me off

to be baptized. My mother was still in a dangerous condition—they didn't let her up for a couple of weeks or so after that—and chose that name for me himself, so 'Williamson' I've been, ever since!"

WE HAD A really very pleasant time together. Morley was popular with the St. Thomas crowd from the very beginning. He was too sensible to mope, and while he didn't exactly rush after entertainment, we went out a good deal, and there is a good deal to go out to in St. Thomas, or was in those days, two years ago, before President Hoover's Economy Program took our Naval personnel out of St. Thomas.

Morley's geniality, his fund of stories, his generous attitude to life, the outstanding kindness and fellowship of the man, brought him a host of new friends, most of whom were my old friends. I was delighted that my prescription for poor old Morley — getting him to come down and stay with me that winter—was working so splendidly.

It was in company with no less than four of these new friends of Morley's, Naval Officers, all four of them, that he and I turned the corner around the Grand Hotel one morning about eleven o'clock and walked smack into trouble! The British sailorman of the Navy kind is, when normal, one of the most

respectful and pleasant fellows alive. He is, as I have observed more than once, quite otherwise when drunk. The dozen or so British tars we encountered that moment, ashore from the Sloop-of-War *Amphitrite*, which lay in St. Thomas' Harbor, were as nasty and truculent a group of human beings as I have ever had the misfortune to encounter. There is no telling where they had acquired their present condition of semi-drunkenness, but there was no question whatever of their joint mood!

"Ho—plasterin' band o' brass-hat ————!" greeted the enormous cockney who seemed to be their natural leader, eyeing truculently the four white-drill tropical uniforms with their shoulder insignia, and rudely jostling Lieutenant Sankers, to whose house we were *enroute* afoot that morning, "fink ye owns the 'ole brasted universe, ye does. I'll show yell!" and with that, the enormous bully, abetted by the salient jeers of his following which had, somehow, managed to elude their ship's Shore Police down to that moment, barged headfirst into Morley, seizing him first by both arms and leaving the soil-marks of a pair of very dirty hands on his immaculate white drill jacket. Then, as Morley quietly twisted himself loose without raising a hand against this attack, the big cockney swung an open hand, and

landed a resounding slap across Morley's face.

This whole affair, of course, occupied no more than a few seconds. But I had time, and to spare, to note the red flush of a sudden, and I thought an unprecedented, anger in Morley's face; to observe the quick tightening of his tremendous muscles, the abrupt tensing of his long right arm, the beautifully-kept hand on the end of it hardening before my eyes into a great, menacing fist; the sudden glint in his deep-set dark-brown eyes, and then—then—I could hardly believe the evidence of my own two eyes—Williamson Morley, on his rather broad pair of feet, was trotting away, leaving his antagonist who had struck him in the face; leaving the rest of us together there in a tight little knot and an extremely unpleasant position on that corner. And then—well, the crisp "quarter-deck" tones of Commander Anderson cut through that second's amazed silence which had fallen. Anderson had seized the psychological moment to turn to these discipline-forgetting tars. He blistered them in a cutting vernacular in no way inferior to their own. He keel-hauled them, warming to his task.

Anderson had them standing at attention, several gaping-mouthed at his extraordinary skill in vituperation, by the time their double Shore Police squad

came around the corner with truncheons in hand; and to the tender mercies of that business-like and strictly sober group we left them.

We walked along in a complete silence, Morley's conduct as plainly dominating everything else in all our minds, as though we were five sandwich-men with his inexcusable cowardice blazoned on our fore-and-aft signboards.

We found him at the foot of the flight of curving steps with its really beautiful metal-wrought railing which leads up to the high entrance of Lieutenant Sankers' house. We went up the steps and into the house together, and when we had taken off our hats and gone into the "hall," or living room, there fell upon us a silence so awkward as to transcend anything else of the kind in my experience. I, for one, could not speak to save my life; could not, it seemed, so much as look at Morley. There was, too, running through my head a half-whispered bit of thick, native, negro, St. Thomian speech, a dialect remark, made to herself, by an aged negro who had been standing, horrified, quite nearby, and who had witnessed our besetting and the fiasco of Morley's ignominious retreat after being struck full in the face. The old woman had muttered: "Him actin' foo save him own soul, de mahn—Gahd keep de mahn stedfas!"

And, as we stood there, and the piling-up silence was becoming simply unbearable, Morley, who quite certainly had not heard this comment of the pious old woman's, proceeded, calmly, in that mellow, deep baritone voice of his, to make a statement precisely bearing out the old woman's contention.

"You fellows are wondering at me, naturally. I'm not sure that even Canevin understands! You see, I've allowed myself to get really angry three times in my life, and the last time I took a resolution that nothing, nothing whatever, nothing *conceivable*, would ever do it to me again! I remembered barely in time this morning, gentlemen. The last time, you see, it cost me three weeks of suspense, nearly ruined me, waiting for a roughneck I had struck to die or recover—compound fracture—and I only tapped him, I thought! Look here!" as, looking about him, he saw a certain corporate lack of understanding on the five faces of his audience.

And, reaching up one of those inordinately long arms of his to where hung an old wrought-iron-barrelled musket, obviously an "ornament" in Sankers' house, hired furnished, he took the thing down, and with no apparent effort at all, in his two hands, broke the stock away from the lock and barrel, and then, still merely with his hands, not using a knee for any pressure between

them such as would be the obvious and natural method for any such feat attempted, with one sweep bent the heavy barrel into a right-angle.

He stood there, holding the strange-looking thing that resulted for us to look at, and then as we stood, speechless, fascinated, with another motion of his hands, and putting forth some effort this time—a herculean heave which made the veins of his forehead stand out abruptly and the sweat start up on his face on which the mark of the big cockney's hand now showed a bright crimson, Williamson Morley bent the gun-barrel back again into an approximate trueness and laid it down on Sankers' hall table.

"It's better the way it is, don't you think?" he remarked, quietly, dusting his hands together, "rather than, probably to have killed that mucker out of Limehouse—maybe two or three of them, if they'd pitched in to help him." Then, in a somewhat altered tone, a faintly perceptible trace of vehemence present in it, he added: "I think you should agree with me, gentlemen!"

I think we were all too stultified at the incredible feat of brute strength we had just witnessed to get our minds very quickly off that. Sankers, our host for the time-being, came-to the quickest.

"Good God!" he cried out, "of

course—rather—o, very much so, Old Man! Good God! — mere bones and cockney meat under those hands!”

And then the rest of them chimed in. It was a complete, almost a painful revulsion on the part of all of them. I, who had known Morley most of my life, had caught his point almost, as it happened, before he had begun to demonstrate it; about the time he had reached up after the old musket on the wall. I merely caught his eye and winked, aligning myself with him as against any possible adverse conclusion of the others.

THIS, OF COURSE, in the form of a choice story, was all over St. Thomas, Black, White, and “Coloured” St. Thomas, within twenty-four hours, and people along the streets began to turn their heads to look after him, as the negroes had done since his arrival, whenever Morley passed among them.

I could hardly fail to catch the way in which my own household reacted to this new information about the physical strength of the stranger within its gates so soon as the grapevine route had apprized its dark-skinned members of the fact. Stephen Penn, the house-man, almost never looked at Morley now, except by the method known among West Indian negroes as “cutting his eyes”, which means a sidewise glance. Esmeralda,

my extremely pious cook, appeared to add to the volume of her crooned hymn-tunes and frequently muttered prayers with which she accompanied her work. And once when my washer’s pick’ny glimpsed him walking across the stone-flagged yard to the side entrance to the West gallery, that coal-black child’s single garment lay stiff against the breeze generated by his flight towards the kitchen door and safety!

It was Esmerelda the cook who really brought about the set of conditions which solved the joint mysteries of Morley’s father’s attitude to him, his late wife’s obvious feeling of dread, and the uniform reaction of every St. Thomas negro whom I had seen in contact with Morley. The *denouement* happened not very long after Morley’s demonstration in Lieutenant Sankers’ house that morning of our encounter with the sailors.

Esmerelda had been trying-out coconut oil, a process, as performed in the West Indies, involving the boiling of a huge kettle of water. This, arranged outdoors, and watchfully presided over by my cook, had days at intervals. Into the boiling water Esmerelda would throw several panfuls of copra, the white meat dug out of the matured nuts. After the oil had been foiled out and when it was floating, this crude product would be skimmed off, and more

copra put into the pot. The final process was managed indoors, with a much smaller kettle, in which the skimmed oil was "boiled down" in a local refining process.

It was during this final stage in her preparation of the oil for the household that old Esmerelda, in some fashion of which I never, really heard the full account, permitted the oil to get on fire, and, in her endeavors to put out the blaze, got her dress afire. Her loud shrieks which expressed fright rather than pain, for the blazing oil did not actually reach the old soul's skin, brought Morley, who was alone at the moment on the gallery reading, around the house and to the kitchen door on the dead run. He visualized at once what had happened, and, seizing an old rag-work floor mat which Esmerelda kept near the doorway, advanced upon her to put out the fire.

At this she shrieked afresh, but Morley, not having the slightest idea that his abrupt answer to her yells for help had served to frighten the old woman almost into a fit, merely wrapped the floor-mat about her and smothered the flames. He got both hands badly burned in the process and Dr. Pelletier dressed them with an immersion in more coconut oil and did them up in a pair of bandages about rubber tissue to keep them moist with the oil dressing in-

side, so that Morley's hands looked like a prize-fighter's with the gloves on. These pudding-like arrangements Dr. Pelletier adjured his patient to leave on for at least forty-eight hours.

We drove home and I declined a dinner engagement for the next evening for Morley on the ground that he could not feed himself! He managed a bowl of soup between his hands at home that evening, and as he had a couple of fingers free outside the bandage on his left hand, assured me that he could manage undressing quite easily. I forgot all about his probable problem that evening, and did not go to his room to give him a hand as I had fully intended doing.

IT WAS NOT until the next day at lunch that it dawned on me that Morley was fully dressed, although wearing pumps into which he could slip his feet, instead of shoes, and wondering how he had managed it. There were certain details, occurring to me, as quite out of the question for a man with hands muffled up, all but the two outside fingers on the left hand, as Morley was. Morley's tie was knotted with his usual careful precision; his hair, as always, was brushed with a meticulous exactitude. His belt-buckle was fastened.

I tried to imagine myself attending to all these details of

dress with both thumbs and six of my eight fingers out of commission. I could not. It was too much for me.

I said nothing to Morley, but after lunch I asked Stephen Penn if he had assisted Mr. Morley to dress.

Stephen said he had not. He had offered to do so, but Mr. Morley had thanked him and replied it wasn't going to be necessary.

I was mystified.

The thing would not leave my mind all that afternoon while Morley sat out there on the West gallery with the bulk of the house between himself and the sun and read various magazines. I went out at last merely to watch him turn the pages. He managed that very easily, holding the magazine across his right forearm and grasping the upper, right-hand corner of a finished page between the two free fingers and the bandage itself whenever it became necessary to turn it over.

That comparatively simple affair, I saw, was no criterion.

The thing got to "worrying" me. I waited, biding my time.

About ten minutes before dinner, carrying the silver swizzel-tray, with a clinking jug and a pair of tall, thin glasses, I proceeded to the door of Morley's room, tapped, rather awkwardly turned the door's handle, my other hand balancing the tray momentarily, and walked in on

him. I had expected, you see, to catch him in the midst of dressing for dinner.

I caught him.

He was fully dressed, except for putting on his dinner jacket. He wore a silk soft shirt and his black tie was knotted beautifully, all his clothes adjusted with his accustomed careful attention to the detail of their precise fit.

I have said he was fully dressed, save for the jacket. Dressed, yes, *but not shod*. His black silk socks and the shining patent-leather pumps which would go on over them lay on the floor beside him, where he sat, in front of his bureau mirror, at the moment of my entrance brushing his ruddy-brown, rather coarse, but highly decorative hair with a pair of ebony backed military brushes. Morley's hair had always been perhaps the best item of his general appearance. It was a magnificent crop, and of a sufficiently odd color to make it striking to look at without being grotesque or even especially conspicuous. Morley had managed a fine parting this evening in the usual place, a trifle to the right of the centre of his forehead. He was smoothing it down now, with the big, black-backed brushes with the long bristles, sitting, so to speak, on the small of his back in the chair.

With those pumps and socks not yet put on I saw Morley's

feet for the first time in my life.

And seeing them I understood those dry rubs in the gymnasium when we were schoolboys together—that curious peculiarity of Morley's which caused him to take his rubs with his track shoes on! "Curious peculiarity," I have said. The phrase is fairly accurate, descriptive, I should be inclined to think, of those feet — feet with well-developed thumbs, like huge, broad hands — feet which he had left to clothe this evening until the last end of his dressing for dinner, because—well, because he had been using them to fasten his shirt at the neck, and tie that exquisite knot in his evening bow. He was using them now, in fact, as I looked dumbfounded, at him, to hold the big military brushes with which he was arranging that striking hair of his.

He caught me, of course, my entrance with the tray—which I managed not to drop—and at first he looked annoyed, and then, true to his lifelong form, Williamson Morley grinned at me in the looking-glass.

"O—good!" said he. "That's great, Gerald. But, Old Man, I think I'll ask you to hold my glass for me, if you please. Brushing one's hair, you see—er—this way, is one thing. Taking a cock-tail is, really, quite another."

And then, quite suddenly, it dawned upon me, and very nearly made me drop that tray

after all, why Morley's father had named him "Williamson."

I set the tray down, very carefully, avoiding Morley's embarrassed eyes, feeling abysmally ashamed of myself for what I, his host, had done — nothing, of course farther from my mind than that I should run into any such oddment as this. I poured out the glasses. I wiped off a few drops I had spilled on the top of the table where I had set the tray. All this occupied some little time, and all through it I did not once glance in Morley's direction.

And when I did, at last, carry his glass over to him, and, looking at him, I am sure, with something like shame in my eyes wished him "Good Health" after our West Indian fashion of taking a drink; Morley needed my hand with his glass in it at his mouth, for the black silk socks and the shining, patent-leather pumps were on his feet now, and the slight flush of his embarrassment had faded entirely from his honest, good-natured face.

And, I thought down inside me, that, whatever his motive in his unique chagrin, Douglas Morley had honored him by naming him "Williamson!" For Williamson Morley, as I had never doubted, and doubted just at that moment rather less than ever before, was a better man than his father — whichever way you care to take it.

The Curse of Amen-Ra

by Victor Rousseau

Why I never read this novelet back in 1932 when I had the issue of **STRANGE TALES** on hand is undoubtedly something for psychologists to speculate over, but the fact is, I didn't. Reading it in 1966, when **FORREST J. ACKERMAN** was the means of my obtaining it again, I was most pleasantly surprised; for while I expected a story with the usual ingredients of Egyptian mummy-curse tales, I did not at all anticipate certain elements which you will find here. Perhaps one reason for this is that **VICTOR ROUSSEAU** not only knew how to write a good thriller, but he also was well-versed in many phases of metaphysics and occultism (I say this from internal evidence of many, not just one or two, of his stories), rather than being a writer who had just picked up enough of the sensational furniture to make a good setting, and sound real to the reader who knew nothing of these things.

THE SCENE all around me was about as repulsive a one as I had ever set eyes upon. On every side the flat, dun marshes, with their heavy growth of

sedge, stretched away. In front of me — yes, that must be Pequod Island, for a strip of foul and sluggish water separated it from the mainland.

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Pequod Island, in the lower reaches of Chesapeake Bay, was barely a hundred feet distant; I could have waded waist-high to it, but for the sucking quick-mud which, I knew, would engulf me if I attempted any such thing.

And there was no need to attempt it, for an ancient ferryman was already poling his antediluvian bark across the narrow channel in my direction. I stopped at the edge of the trail and waited for him.

He hailed me, using indistinguishable words in a local dialect that was unintelligible to me. Then, just out of reach, he held the punt with his pole and peered at me out of his deep-set eyes under their white, thick eyebrows, while he chewed and worked his chin with its stained shaggy gray beard.

"Well, what are you waiting there for?" I asked impatiently. "Don't you see I want to cross?"

"Aye, ye want to cross, do ye? But what do ye want to cross for? Who d'ye want to see?" I managed to make out.

"I want to see Mr. Neil Farrant, if you've got to know," I answered. "I didn't know this island was private, though."

"Neil Farrant? What, him that's got the mummies down to Tap's Point?" There was a look of fear in the old ferryman's eyes. "He won't see ye. Won't see nobody. There was scores turned away when he first brung

them here. Pestered the life out of him, they did. University professors and all — but he wouldn't see none of them."

"Well, this is different," I answered. "My name's Jim Dewey, and Mr. Farrant has especially requested me to call and help him with his work."

"Jim Dewey?" The ferryman turned the quid of tobacco in his mouth. "Yeah, I seem ter remember Mr. Farrant saying you could come."

But he still stood there, leaning upon his pole, eyeing me with ruminating, brooding suspicion.

"Well, why don't you bring the boat near enough for me to step down?" I asked.

"See here, mister, how'd I know you ain't come to try to help one of Doctor Coyne's loonies to escape?" he asked.

"What the devil do you mean? Who's he?" I answered. But before the old man could speak again it flashed across my mind that Neil had told me the island was occupied principally by the house and extensive grounds of Doctor Rolf Coyne's private sanitarium, where some of the wealthiest and most hopelessly insane of Virginia and other States were housed.

That was why Neil, who had been associated with Doctor Coyne for three or four years before his departure for Egypt, as assistant to the University of North Virginia Excavation Fund,

had chosen this lonely spot in which to work out certain experiments with the mummies that he had brought back. And I, because we had been friends through our four years at the University together, was to be permitted to assist in his task.

He had written me in guarded terms that had aroused my curiosity, had asked me to wire him whether I could come, and I had wired back my acceptance.

THE OLD ferryman winked at me. "There's fellers wouldn't stop at helping the most desp'rit of them loonies to git away, if they was well paid for it," he said. "And they got away more than once. That's why we don't have no bridge between the island and the mainland. I'm Old Incorruptible, I am. That's what the doctor calls me. If you're a friend of Mr. Farrant's, I reckon you got the right to cross, but if you're thinking of gittin' some of them poor devils away, lemme tell you Doctor Coyne's bloodhounds will run ye down and tear ye to pieces."

"Well, I'm not going to wait here all day while you're making up your mind whether I'm a fit person to cross," I retorted. "So bring your boat up to the bank, or get back where you came from, and I'll phone Mr. Farrant you refused to take me over."

The ancient chewed a minute or two on that, then reluctantly

poled up to the bank. Clutching my suitcase, I stepped aboard, and the old man pushed back through the muddy water toward the opposite shore.

"How much to pay?" I asked, as we finally landed.

"Ye can make it what ye like, mister," he answered. "Money don't mean nothing to me. Old Incorruptible, the doctor called me, and that's what I am. Ye can make it a quarter, or ye can make it fifty cents."

Having no change, I handed him a dollar, and told him to keep it. His eyes bulged avariciously as he pocketed the bill. "Now which way to Mr. Farrant's house?" I asked.

"Down to Tap's Point," replied the ancient. "Foller that road through the village, and you'll come to the house a quarter mile or so beyond. But listen, mister." He seized me by the arm as I was about to stride down the weed-grown road. "Ye won't never come back. None of them done, who opened the graves in which them mummies lay. Only Mr. Farrant, and that was because he was a healer. Mr. Burke and Mr. Watrous, and that English lord whose name I fergit — all of them died, because of the curse that was put upon anyone opening them dead princes' and princesses' graves.

"Folks think we don't know down to Tap's Point, but we seen it all in the Sunday news-

papers, and we ain't minded to have them dead mummies prowling round our homes and killing our children. I'm warning you, mister, the first person who's killed on Pequod Island, there's going to be a reckoning. Excepting you. If you want to commit suicide, you're welcome to it. But keep them mummies out of our homes."

He leaned forward and tapped me on the shoulder. "When you see them hawks, look out for trouble," he whispered. "The hounds knows, and we knows. You'd better not have come."

"You talk like a madman," I retorted. It irked me to think that the silly legend of a curse, fostered by the admittedly strange deaths of so many members of the expedition, had become known among these clowns. But the old man only went on chewing tobacco and grinning at me derisively; I turned from him and, with my suitcase in my hand, went striding down the track of a road that ran toward Tap's Point.

PEQUOD ISLAND was more picturesque than I had supposed from the sight I had obtained of it from the flat shore opposite. In a few minutes I was passing between stretches of juniper and stunted cypress. Then I saw, far back through the trees, a great building, a cluster of buildings, which I knew must be Doctor Coyne's

private sanitarium. There was an open space with tennis nets, and men were playing. Others were strolling in the grounds. Everything was open and unfenced — why shouldn't it be, with the Bay on one side, and that stretch of muddy water on the other, and the bloodhounds?

I passed the grounds of the sanitarium and came to a straggling village beside the water, where a few fishing boats, drawn up, proclaimed the nature of the livelihood of the occupants. Two or three men, slouching about, stared at me sullenly, and a woman glared defiantly from an open doorway, and muttered something as I went by. Another clutched a small child to her, as if I were some kidnapper.

I passed them, head erect, carrying my suitcase. I was still filled with indignation at the monstrous stories in circulation, all due to the fact that Neil Farrant had managed to bring back, in some unauthorized way, three or four of the mummy cases from the tomb of the kings that had recently been opened in Upper Egypt. And from what I remembered of Neil, I didn't for a moment suppose that he placed any stock in the absurd stories of a curse.

I had never known a more hard-headed fellow than my classmate. In fact, I had wondered a good deal at the guarded nature of his letter, and his

remarks about certain experiments.

Well, the village was past me, and Tap's Point lay behind. The thread of foul water had broadened into a bay, on which three or four of the fishing boats were engaged in hauling in their booty. The sun was quite low in the west. The scene had suddenly become wild and beautiful. In front of me was a grove of trees, but there was sea debris right up to their edge, and I guessed that at times storms had submerged this corner of the island.

Then unexpectedly I saw Neil's house. It was an old farmhouse, extending over quite a large stretch of ground, and built solidly of stone. At some early date it had probably been the country home of some Colonial gentleman.

THE EDGE OF the sun had dipped down into the bay. Nothing was stirring in the quiet of the evening; the sails of the boats hung listlessly. I could no longer see the fishermen aboard, but something was hanging overhead. It was a hawk. And another hawk joined it, coming apparently from the direction of the sanatorium. Then a third and fourth came into view.

Fish hawks, I thought; nothing remarkable about their presence there. But what was it that the old fool had said

about hawks? "When you see them hawks, look out for trouble!"

Well, I saw them, and a fifth, and a sixth, and I had no presentiment of trouble — only a sense of pleasure in the mildness of the evening as I approached the door of Neil's house. I noticed that the windows were all tightly shuttered in front and on both sides of the house, and wondered at that a little, for Neil had been a fresh-air fiend in our early days. I passed up the worn, crazy-stone path and tapped at the door.

I was conscious that the hawks had been following me, but I thought nothing of that. I knew that hawks would follow fishermen — at least, fishing hawks; and the fact that some eight or nine of them were circling above my head aroused no particular emotion in me. I tapped at the door of the shack, anticipating the moment of Neil's delighted recognition of me.

No answer came, and I tapped again, more loudly. Then I heard Neil's voice inside. "Who is it? What do you want here?"

Strangely harsh and uncouth it sounded; but I guessed that he had been made the victim of the crazy suspicions of the villagers.

"It's Jim Dewey. Didn't you expect me?" I called.

"Jim Dewey? Why didn't you

wire me, man, as I asked you to do?"

"I did wire. I guess the telegraph system is a little slow in this part of the world," I answered. "Aren't you going to let me in?"

"Sure, but — you're alone, Jim? There's nothing with you?"

"Of course not," I answered.

There sounded the shuffling of Neil's feet inside the door, then the cautious removal of a chain. Inch by inch the door opened, until Neil stood before me. I was amazed at the transformation in him. The desert heat and sun had browned and wasted him; there was a three days' stubble of a beard upon his face, and his clothes hung loose about his wasted frame. He looked years older.

"Well, Neil, you don't seem half glad to see me," I said, putting out my hand.

I saw his hand advance; then he glanced over my shoulder, and a cry burst from his lips. I thought he was going to slam the door in my face.

"The hawks! The hawks! Keep them out!" he shouted.

And as we stood there, the birds, huger than any other hawks I had ever seen, suddenly swooped for the door with incredible velocity. I was half inside and half outside, and in an instant the two of us were involved in a tangle of fluttering pinions.

The birds seemed to have

gone mad. They swooped down upon us with the utmost fearlessness, yet it was not we who seemed to be the object of their attack. They were apparently imbued with the sole determination of getting inside the house. I saw Neil seize one of them in his hands and almost rend the head from the body. It fluttered out through the doorway, and then, as it magically recovered, soared on high and swooped down at us again.

I did my best against the evil-smelling feathered throng, but my face and hands were quickly a mass of scratches as the talons tore at me.

Then somehow we had won. The last of the winged intruders had been driven from the house, and Neil had dragged me inside and closed the door. For a few moments the birds fluttered against it, then soared away.

At the same moment I heard one of the hounds in Doctor Coyne's sanitarium give tongue, then another and another. And I became aware that the sun had set, and darkness was fast settling about us.

I stared at Neil, who was covered with scratches too.

"Well, we kept them out, Jim," he said. "Better come up to the bathroom and let's put some iodine on these scratches."

"Why don't you shoot those birds?" I asked him. "They must be mad."

"They — don't die, Jim. That's the trouble. I'll — tell you about it."

2

AFTER WE HAD washed and disinfected our scratches, Neil led the way down to the ground floor of the building. We passed through a poorly furnished living room, filled with the ugly furniture of the 1870's, fitted up with bookcases filled with books, seemed to deal principally with Egyptology and medieval works on astrology and such subjects. Thence through another room, and so we came to a very long room at the back, which must once have been some kind of storeroom.

It was built entirely of stone, and the numerous windows were heavily shuttered, the shutters being kept in place with iron bars.

Neil switched on a cluster of electric lights in the ceiling, and I perceived that this was his museum. The room was filled with priceless trophies that he had brought back from Egypt. There were two chairs from a tomb, papyrus scrolls, a glass cabinet with various objects resting upon shelves. The room was filled with the pungent odor of spices.

I hardly noticed any of these things, however; my attention was immediately riveted upon five wooden caskets, mummy

cases, placed on a dais against the wall and held in position by brackets. On the exterior of each was beautifully painted the representation of the body within. One of these was the painting of a girl, of such exquisite and noble beauty that I could hardly take my eyes away from it.

You know how closely the ancient Egyptian type approximates to certain of the finest types of today. Except that the eyes were conventionally too large, the lineaments were perfect. The little, slightly tilted nose, the small chin, the expression of breeding, of a certain wistfulness, the success of the ideal that the artist had endeavored to portray almost took away my breath.

I saw Neil looking at me and smiling slightly. For the first time he looked more like his old self than the haggard, grim-faced man whom I had met half an hour before.

"The Princess Amen-Ra," he said, watching me as I stared at the painting, "is of a very old dynasty of Egyptian kings, concerning whose date there is still some dispute. It is certain that she antedated Moses and the Children of Israel by several hundred years. Would you like to hear her story, Jim?"

"After her brother's death," he went on, without waiting for my answer, "she ruled the kingdom. She lived and died unmar-

ried. These others" — he pointed to the four other caskets — "are the priests and councilors who were associated with her.

"Her reign is legendary, but it is called the Golden Age of Egypt. During her life the Nile always gave up its proper quota of fertilizing waters; the land remained at peace. Everywhere was prosperity. She was worshiped as divine.

"Only one thing troubled the priesthood. It was considered necessary that she should marry. The question was who was fit to mate with her. A foreign spouse was unthinkable, for Amen-Ra was believed to descend from the god Osiris.

"There was a young nobleman of Thebes named Menes, who had fallen in love with the princess, and his love was reciprocated. He was too powerful to be condemned or banished, yet the astrologers had predicted that such a marriage would bring down the anger of the gods upon the realm. So the priests conspired to put the young nobleman to death, together with the princess' councilors, for the sake of Egypt.

"On the night of the nuptial ceremony the conspirators broke into the palace and murdered Menes and the chief councilors who had assented to the marriage, yet not until one of the latter, by his magic arts, had caused the Nile to flood the land, and an earthquake that

shook down the palace walls. The princess took her own life by poison, in despair. There seems to have been a peasant uprising, too, which completed the disaster. All this is described in that papyrus."

Neil pointed to the glass-covered scroll which stood immediately behind the casket.

"The body of Menes was never discovered," he continued. "But those who survived the disaster dug out those of the princess and her councilors, and these were carefully embalmed, without removing the brain or viscera, which was not done until a later period in Egyptian history. They were buried in the Temple of Set, and unearthed by our expedition.

"ACCORDING to the Egyptian belief, after a period of some three thousand years, the Ba would return to reanimate these bodies, when the princess and her advisors would rearise from the tomb to rule the land again and restore it to its ancient glories."

"The Ba was the soul?" I asked.

"The Ba was the soul — as distinct from the Ka, the double, or astral body. There was also the winged Ish, the spirit that dwelled in the abode of the gods. But as for Menes, it is believed that his body was reduced to ashes. You see, the lovers had sworn eternal fealty,

by the god Horus, a pledge that neither life nor death should separate them. And the priests were horribly afraid that Menes would return to claim his bride after three thousand years, when Egypt's ancient glories would return.

"Over the sarcophagus was inscribed a curse against anyone who should ever tampered with the tombs. The widespread legend sufficed to keep them inviolate against both desert robbers and the Moslem invaders of the country. We were the first to open them."

"But, Neil, you don't believe in that stuff about the curse, do you?" I asked him.

"Well, I didn't — when I went along with the University of Virginia expedition. But what happened? Lord Cardingham, who had largely financed the expedition, fell into an excavation and broke his neck. Burke was taken sick with a mysterious fever and died within a day. Plague, they called it — but there is no plague in Upper Egypt."

"Watrous pricked his finger with a thorn splinter and died of blood poisoning. Three of our natives died mysteriously within a week. Lewis and Holmes were taken ill and sent down to the coast. Lewis died, and Holmes was drowned when his vessel was shipwrecked off Sicily."

"By that time, I was the last

left. I was supposed to be immune against the curse, because I was the physician of the party. I didn't believe — but I had seen too much to disbelieve. I determined to sift the matter to the bottom.

"I succeeded, by bribes, in persuading some of the natives to load the coffins and trophies upon a flat-bottomed boat. I managed to get them down to the coast and so to America. Doctor Coyne, with whom I had worked, and one of the leading neurologists of the world, suggested that I should have the use of this old house, which he owns, in which to carry out my experiment."

"What experiment?" I asked, looking at Neil incredulously, for his face was almost fanatical.

"First," answered Neil, "I must have it from your own lips that you are prepared to associate yourself with me, taking your chance of coming under the curse."

"I've told you I'm in to the limit," I answered. "But so far as the curse is concerned, I think it's a lot of poppycock."

NEIL LOOKED at me in a queer way, and walked to the papyrus. He began translating:

"That Menes, the accursed one, who has been utterly destroyed by fire, may never return to any Earthly habitation . . . the curse of Horus, the

curse of Anubis, of Osiris, of Hapimous, of the Nile god, of Shu, of the winds, of the god Mesti, the hawk-headed, rest upon him who shall violate these tombs. May he die by water, thorn, and fire . . ."

"Does it really say 'thorn', Neil?" I asked, remembering that Watrous had died from a thorn splinter.

"May he die by pestilence and the winds and shipwreck, and by the beak and claw of Mesti. May his bowels be consumed by inward fire, and he and all his perish. May he . . ."

"But I reckon that's enough," continued Neil, looking back at me from the papyrus. His manner grew almost furtive. "How would you like to take a look at the little princess?" he asked in a low tone.

"I certainly should," I answered. "Do you mean to say . . ."

"Yes, I've opened them all. Of course the dampness of Pequod Island would play havoc with them. But, you see, the experiment . . ."

He broke off, went to the cabinet, and took out a chisel, which he inserted in the edge of the mummy casket. Evidently he had opened the casket a number of times, for the lid, which was perfectly preserved, despite the centuries that had

passed, slid off, disclosing a plainer and unpainted coffin. The lid of this Neil removed in turn, and I saw before me the mummy of the young girl, swathed in the rotting linen fabric, which diffused an almost unbearable odor of natron and spices.

Only the contours were visible; the linen swathed the whole head and body like a winding sheet. Yet I could see that it had been unwound and wound repeatedly, and, I imagined, by Neil. His hands were snaking. He no longer seemed aware of my presence. Nor of the sudden fluttering of wings without the shuttered windows, and the rending of claws against the bars.

Somehow the proximity of the hawks seemed to me to be connected with what Neil was doing. I shuddered at the sound, but it was not repeated; I watched Neil begin to unwind the upper layer of linen, so that the contours of the mummy's head gradually grew plainer.

I saw tufts of dark hair appear, and I was amazed at its perfect preservation. It was the eeriest experience I had ever known, to stand there and see this figure of the long-dead Egyptian princess gradually coming to light.

Of a sudden Neil stopped in the midst of his work, looked around and saw me. For an instant he stared at me as if he

did not recognize me, as if I were some hostile intruder. And I, in turn, was astonished at the transformation that had come over him.

He looked again as he had looked at the moment of our meeting in the doorway. That lean, cadaverous form of his looked rather like that of a desert sheik than of a twentieth-century American.

"Jim—what the devil!" he began, and then seemed to recollect me. He pulled himself together with a visible effort.

"I'm all worked up over this business, Jim," he said. "Excuse me if I seem queer. I was going to show you the mummy of Amen-Ra, but I guess she'll keep."

"Now that you've gone so far, I'd like to see the rest," I answered. But he was already staring into space as if I had vanished completely from his consciousness. And mechanically his hands went on unwinding the linen shroud.

One more turn, I thought—but there were several, for the material was now as fine as silk, and perfectly preserved. Another turn, and another, and still two more; and then, just as I was beginning to wonder when the process would come to an end, the last layer fell away, and the face and torso of the Amen-Ra were revealed to me.

I STARED AT the face and

gasped. This a mummy? This the face of a girl who had died countless centuries before? Why, she might only just have died. The skin, with its delicate olive tinge, was perfectly preserved, it even seemed slightly flushed, as if the blood pulsed underneath its peach-smooth surface. The eyes were closed, but there was the hint of a pupil beneath the white eyelid, shaded with long, black lashes.

And it seemed to me as if the ghost of a smile hovered about the mouth, a smile, a loving, mocking smile, as if the dead girl's last thoughts had been of the man to whom she had sworn by the god Horus that neither life nor death should separate them!

I looked at that face, with its beauty and high breeding, and the tragedy of the old story gripped my heart. This girl seemed so alive! It was incredible that all this had happened in the dim dawn of history.

Suddenly Neil flung himself down before the coffin. His hands clasped the sides of the wooden case. He looked into the face of the dead princess, and a sobbing moan came from his lips.

"Amen - Ra! Amen - Ra!" he cried. "I love you still, and ever I have awaited you. I have been true to the oath we swore together, and Horus, whom we trusted, will yet restore us to one another! Do you not know

me? Wake from your long sleep and speak to me. Look at me, and tell me that you love me still."

And then strange sounds burst in impassioned utterance from his lips. I supposed it was ancient Egyptian that he was speaking. I moved forward and laid my hand upon his shoulder.

"Neil," I said, "you mustn't give way like this. Pull yourself together, man!"

But his whole form was rigid as a rock, or, rather, like that of a man-in catalepsy. And as I hesitated, uncertain what to do, once more there came that horrid rending of claws against the outside of the shuttered windows.

Of course everything was perfectly clear in my mind. Neil Farrant's mind had become unhinged by brooding over his companions' death. He had lived with his mummies hourly, almost, since he had smuggled them out of Egypt—and he had lived alone. Again I sought to bring him back to himself, but with equal unsuccess.

"Do you not remember Menes, Princess Amen-Ra?" he asked, as he stroked the chill cheeks. "Will you not wake, only for one little instant, and remember?"

And then something happened that I knew must be imagination, but I went staggering back like a tipsy man. I could have sworn that the eyelids of the dead princess fluttered slightly,

and that the faint smile about the corners of her mouth deepened just the least bit in the world. And I stood helpless, while Neil kneeled there and fondled the mummy's cheek, and again I could have sworn that the eyelids fluttered.

From the sanitarium came the deep baying of one of the bloodhounds, and another and another took up the cry. I stood there, helpless, watching the living man make love to the dead woman.

3

IT WAS THE sharp ringing of the telephone in the next room that startled Neil from his spell. He leaped to his feet and stood staring from me to the mummy until his clouded brain seemed to clear.

"Well, Jim, you've seen her," he said; and I could tell from his tones that he was utterly unaware of the scene that had just been enacted. "Pretty little thing, wasn't she, and astonishingly life-like, even yet. I've been waiting for you to come down and help me with my experiment tonight. Coyne believes in it. It explains all the mystery of the whole process of mummification — all that the explorers and Egyptologists have been trying to discover . . ."

But he broke off as the telephone began again to ring insistently, and moved toward the door. He was quite his normal self now.

"I guess that's Coyne," he said. "I forgot to tell you that I was to bring you over there to dinner tonight. Excuse me while I answer it."

He hurried out of the room. I was convinced that Neil recalled nothing of that wild outburst of his. He seemed like a man with a dual personality. No doubt in his alternating state he had imagined himself to be the half-mythical Menes, the princess' lover of centuries before.

Again I looked at the face of the dead princess in the light of the electric cluster. What fools one's imagination can make of one! I had been as sure as I could be sure of anything that a sort of semivitality lingered in her, that her mouth and eyelids had moved, though I had refused to believe my senses.

And my senses had tricked me; now I could see that the face, beautiful though it still was, and looking almost as natural as life, was simply the well-preserved face of a mummy. There was no trace of vitality about those waxen features.

I heard Neil on the telephone: "Yes, Coyne, Dewey's here. Got here about an hour ago. I've told him we're dining with you, and we'll be over right away. The experiment? Tonight, maybe, if you're agreeable. Yes, indeed, Jim Dewey's the right man. I trust him more than I'd trust another living soul."

I heard Neil hang the receiver up, and he came back to me.

"Yes, it's Coyne," he said; "he wants me to bring you over. He's a fine fellow, and you'll enjoy meeting him. We'll have to hurry. I must wrap up this mummy first, though. The air's too damp. I oughtn't to have unrolled the bandages, but do you know, Jim," he laughed, "I've taken quite a liking to the little lady. Odd a fellow falling in love with a mummy, eh?"

He kneeled down and with deft, experienced fingers rerolled the linen bandages, until nothing of the princess was visible except the contours. Then he replaced the inner and the outer shells.

"Ready, Jim?" he asked. "Let's start, then. It's only five minutes' walk over there. You go out first, and I'll see that none of those damned hawks gets in."

I STEPPED OUT of the house. High overhead, against the moon, I saw the soaring covey, but this time the hawks made no attempt to interfere with us, and in another moment Neil had joined me, closing and locking the door behind him.

"I keep this place shut tight," he said. "Those villagers have an insatiable curiosity, and they learned all about the mummies from one of the Sunday newspapers. There's a fellow named Jones who runs the ferry, who's the worst of the lot. Always

prowling around here. Coyne calls him the Old Incorruptible, because he once refused an offer of five thousand dollars from the brother of one of the patients to get his brother out of the sanitarium."

We walked along side-by-side, striking a track that ran inland in the direction of the asylum. A storm was coming up, and great waves were pounding the beach steadily, yet the air was deathly still, oppressive and suffocating. I was wondering if Neil remembered anything of what had happened.

"We'll have to shoot off those hawks," he said. "I believe the smell of natron from the mummies affects them as catnip affects the feline tribe. I've tried to shoot them, but they're too wary."

But he had told me that the hawks wouldn't die, and I had seen him almost tear the head of one from its body, without destroying its life!

I glanced sidewise at him. He was again the Neil Farrant whom I had known, save that he was leaned and bronzed by the Egyptian suns. I determined to speak to Doctor Coyne about him, if I found the doctor approachable.

We passed beneath some fine old live-oaks, of massive size, then crossed a wide and well-kept lawn. There was no fence, and no sign of the bloodhounds. In one place were the tennis

nets, in another a bowling green, with no evidence even of night guards.

There were a number of smaller buildings grouped about the main one, all of them lit. The institution presented a fine well-kept, and up-to-date appearance.

We rang the bell of the front door, and a nurse in uniform opened it. She smiled at Neil.

"I believe the doctor's waiting for you," she said. "Please step inside."

IN ANOTHER moment we were in the presence of Doctor Coyne in a large reception room, beyond which I could see the medical office, with its cabinets of instruments, chair, and other appliances. Neil presented me, and Doctor Coyne took my hand, giving me a keen, searching look as he did so.

He was an elderly man, between sixty and seventy, as I should judge, with scrutinizing blue eyes and a deeply wrinkled face. Judgment and character were imprinted on it; a man who knew human nature in the raw, as such a man must necessarily know it.

"I'm delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Dewey," he said. "Farrant has often spoken to me of you, and how anxious he was to get you to collaborate with him in his work. I think you are both extremely fortunate. And now, since dinner is

ready, let's go in, without formalities." He looked at my face. "I hope you didn't get those scratches trying to find the way across our island."

"No, we were attacked by some hawks," I said, as he started toward the dining room.

Coyne's brow clouded. "They're pests," he answered. "I'm sorry you had an experience immediately upon your arrival. They're sort of fish hawk peculiar to Pequod Island, and for some reason seem to have turned vicious and to attack human beings. We've organized shooting parties, but they're too wary."

At a number of small tables in the dining room, men and women were already at dinner. Some of them rose and bowed at the doctor's entrance, others continued their meal as if unaware of his presence.

I noticed that there were more waiters than could possibly be needed. Some of these were standing against the walls, taking no part in the service, and I guessed that they were probably attendants in waiter's garb.

The doctor led the way to a small table at the farther end of the room, flanked by two enormous bow windows, through which I could see the lights of the village in the distance. The pounding of the surf was very heavy, and there was still that oppressive sense in the air.

Coyne drew me out over a very good meal. I told him about my friendship with Neil, and of the post at the Biological Institution that I had relinquished at his request, in order to join him in his experiments on the Island.

"Has our friend here shown you the mummy of the pretty little princess?" asked Coyne. "If not, you've missed a treat." And, as he spoke, he gave me a queer look that I could not quite interpret.

"Yes," I answered. "She must have been a beauty in her day."

"Her story is a most romantic one, according to the papyrus," said Coyne. "Farrant, you haven't told Mr. Dewey about the experiment yet?"

I glanced at Neil, who answered indifferently, "No, I haven't told him. We must try it tonight, though, Doctor. I've only been waiting for Jim's arrival."

"Well, we'll see if it can be done," replied the doctor. I could see that he was somewhat ill at ease, but could not divine the reason. Neil was fidgeting with his knife and fork; somehow it seemed to me that we were all at cross purposes.

"I suppose these people here are all convalescents?" I asked, to change the subject.

"Unfortunately no," answered the doctor in a lowered voice. "As a matter of fact, I take in general only the more or less

hopeless cases. Occasionally a patient of mine recovers, but usually it is in the face of the textbook. Now that man, for instance," he went on, indicating a placid, elderly gentleman in evening clothes, whom I had noticed eating his dinner with a wooden spoon, "is liable to outbursts of homicidal frenzy. I have succeeded in convincing him that the handling of knives and forks sets up injurious galvanic currents in his system. You may notice that he is under pretty close observation by the attendants. After dinner I shall have pleasure in showing you some of my other cases, which are unable to mingle with the rest."

AT THIS MOMENT, a woman at a table near us dropped her knife and fork with a clatter.

"This meat is electrified, Doctor!" she cried, leaping to her feet. "It's shot through and through with gamma rays! I appeal to you, Doctor, do you permit my enemies to carry on their murderous work under your very nose?"

"Arthur, bring me Mrs. Latham's plate," said the doctor calmly to a waiter. "Please sit down and compose yourself, Mrs. Latham. Another plate for Mrs. Latham from the kitchen, please. If any such attempt has been made, madam, we shall spare no efforts to get to the bottom of the trouble."

"But they're too powerful for you!" shrilled the woman. "My enemies can use your laboratory to insert gamma rays in my food, and after all I've gone through, just because of my wretched little bit of money!"

An elderly woman in the uniform of a nurse appeared upon the scene and touched Mrs. Latham on the arm. Still expostulating, she suffered herself to be led away. With her departure, the evident signs of rising excitement on the part of the rest of the diners died down, and the meal was resumed.

"That plate shall be examined in my laboratory as soon as possible," observed Coyne, as if with the purpose of satisfying everybody. I was interested in the way the doctor had handled the incident. Soon the diners were eating and chatting pleasantly, as if there had been no interruption.

But there was something queer about the relations between the doctor and Neil. In fact, it almost seemed to me as if Coyne's attitude toward Neil, too, was a patient. I was watching it and wondering when the dinner ended. By ones and twos and little groups the patients filed out of the room. As soon as the last of them had gone, Coyne rose suddenly.

"Farrant," he said, "if you really mean to try that experiment this evening, I can be with you in an hour."

"Splendid," answered Neil. "Then I'll hurry back with Jim."

"I think it might be better for you to have everything ready when I bring Mr. Dewey with me," answered Coyne. "You'll remember I promised to show him some of those cases of mine."

Neil looked irresolute, while Coyne's manner had grown almost peremptory. "Well, just as you say. Don't disappoint me, though. You see — well, I outlined the idea to you."

"I'll come, whatever happens," answered Coyne. "You can rely upon me."

Neil left the house. The doctor watched him go. He turned to me. "Poor Farrant!" he said. "He's suffering from mental instability brought on by his experiences in Egypt and by overwork."

"You mean that he's insane?" I asked in amazed horror. Of a sudden everything seemed to be growing clear to me.

"Insanity," replied Coyne slowly, "is a mere medical term. Certainly Farrant was not brought here as a patient." The doctor paused. "But since he has been here . . . However, I think it might be better to postpone what I was going to tell you until we have visited the cases that I was speaking about. They have an intimate relationship — but there, again . . ."

HE BROKE OFF oddly, and conducted me out of the main building and into another opposite it, a smaller one separated by a graveled driveway. In the lobby a uniformed nurse was sitting. She rose up as we entered. Nodding to her, Coyne led the way up two flights of stairs to an upper story, which ran the whole length of the building, and had a number of doors on either side of the main corridor.

Two other nurses were seated in wicker chairs in a recess about the middle of this.

"Anything been happening, Miss Crawford?" Coyne inquired of one of them, speaking in his brusque way.

"I'm afraid old Mr. Friend is going to pass out tonight," she answered. "He's very low."

"We'll take a look at him," said Coyne, and turned to me. "Some of my oldest patients seem to be about to leave this Earthly scene, and they all seem to have taken it into their heads to make their exit together."

The nurse unlocked one of the doors, and we entered. On the bed, looking as if he was in his last stupor, lay a very old man, withered and dried to almost mummylike proportions. It was odd to see how he seemed shriveling into that condition while life remained in him, as if he had been embalmed by

the Egyptians thousands of years ago. It seemed impossible that life could be continuing in that withered frame. He lay perfectly still, breathing very faintly, and apparently in his last coma.

There came a fluttering of wings against the screen of the window, which I noticed was at least twice as thick and strong as an ordinary screen. For a moment one of the obscene fowls clung there with its claws, its vicious eyes staring into mine. Then, as the doctor made a threatening gesture with his hand, it disappeared silently into the night.

The doctor turned to the nurse. "If you notice any change, have Doctor Sellers administer a strong intravenous injection," he ordered. "We must keep him alive as long as possible. How about the others?"

"They're about the same as they were," the nurse replied.

She unlocked several doors successively. There were three other old men, all pretty near the end of their lives' journeys. Two of them lay stretched out on their beds in a semiconscious state, the third was seated in a chair, staring in front of him. He paid not the slightest attention to our entrance.

"This one has been with me for twenty-three years," said the doctor in a low voice. "How are you feeling tonight, Mr. Welland?" he asked, touching the old man on the shoulder.

Slowly Welland turned his head around, as if it moved by some smooth mechanism. I shuddered at the look in his eyes. Why, they were the eyes of a mummy, painted on a mummy case! The old man muttered something and then relapsed into his stupor.

"Yes, he's pretty far gone," whispered Coyne to me, and, signing to the nurse to leave the room, he led me into the little embrasure of the window.

"Before I show you my last patient, Dewey," he said, "I think we ought to come to an understanding, especially in view of the experiment that poor Farrant is planning to perform tonight. You are going to see — whether it succeeds or not — extraordinary things of whose existence I myself was for a long time skeptical. I was forced to believe in them after — after Farrant came to the Island.

"He's spoken to me a lot about you, Dewey, and I don't mind admitting that I've looked up your record. Also, I'm a pretty shrewd judge of men. Our acquaintance has been short, but I believe you are peculiarly the proper person to assist in the experiment. In short, I have faith in you, Dewey, and I perceive in you that very rare thing: an open mind.

"I told you Farrant is not himself. It is a case of what is known as dual personality. Of course such cases are not rare,

but they are rarer than they are supposed to be."

I DIDN'T KNOW what he was driving at. I looked over his shoulder, to meet the mummy eyes of old Mr. Welland, seated in his chair. Why was Coyne showing me his patients, and what had these to do with Farrant and his mummies? Somehow I believed there was a close connection; the doctor had hinted at one.

"You are familiar with the literature upon the subject?" asked Coyne.

As it happened, I was, and I told him so. He seemed delighted.

"I run this sanitarium on what might be called unorthodox lines," he said. "It has been suspected for a long time that cases of dual personality, so-called, are really cases of possession."

"By — what?"

"By other entities, Dewey."

"You mean — by the dead?" I blurted out.

"By other entities, living or dead," Coyne answered. "There is undoubtedly another entity that is endeavoring to take possession of Neil Farrant. I think that, on occasion, it has succeeded; and it is possible that you have already noticed it."

"But — but . . ." I stammered. The suggestion that the long-dead Egyptian, Menes, was attempting to control the body of

Neil Farrant violated all the canons of common sense for me. I saw the doctor observing me with his shrewd gaze.

"Let us go and see our last patient, Dewey," was the only comment he vouchsafed, and led the way out into the hall, where the nurse was waiting for us.

"Miss Ware?" he asked.

"She's exactly the same as she's been for the past two weeks," the woman replied.

"I'll see her," said Coyne. "This," he explained to me, "is a case of what is called *dementia praecox*. For weeks at a time the patient will remain in the same state, without apparent consciousness. Miss Rita Ware comes of a noted southern family, and was at one time engaged to marry a fine young fellow, the son of a millionaire cotton-mill proprietor. She broke the engagement. Soon after, symptoms of insanity developed. She has been with me for nearly a year."

"Is there no hope for her?" I asked.

"*Dementia praecox*, a disease of adolescence, is generally considered incurable," replied Coyne. "In some cases, with my methods, I have accomplished a good deal. But, as I said, they are unorthodox, and I have to rely mainly on myself, though Sellers, a young fellow whom I am training — well, he's learning to apply them."

He shrugged his shoulders again. "Well," he said to the nurse, "let's take a look at Miss Ware."

The nurse led the way to a door at the end of the long corridor, and unlocked it. The room within was much larger than the other rooms that I had seen. In the light of the small electric bulb that burned over the bed, I could see that it was tastefully furnished, with pictures, bright hangings, and rugs.

Seated in a large wicker arm-chair, her face turned away from us, was a young woman. Like the others, she gave no sign of recognizing us as we entered the room. Doctor Coyne moved round in front of her and peered into her face. He raised an arm, which, when he released it, dropped immediately back into its position.

"Come here, Dewey, please," said Coyne in an authoritative tone. "Keep your self-control. Look into her face, and — you may begin to understand."

I moved toward the chair. And at that instant the storm broke with maniacal fury. The light in the room went out, the lights that streamed through the windows of the buildings upon the lawn vanished instantly. There came a vivid lightning flash, and a thunderclap.

And the storm broke. Not within a few seconds, but instantaneously. The howling of the wind seemed to rock the

building. A deluge of water poured in through the open window. Simultaneously, from outside, came what sounded like the shriek of a lost soul.

For an instant, in the light of the flash, which split the heavens in twain, I saw the hideous faces and strong beaks of two of the hawks, peering in at me through the strong screen. The next, as if animated by some diabolical fury, the winged devils had torn their way through, and were in the room — not two, but twenty of them.

THE NURSE screamed. Coyne ripped out an oath. I put up my hands instinctively to protect my eyes, but the hawks seemed to have no designs on me. One of them settled for an instant upon the head of the unconscious girl, and then the devils were in the corridor.

Coyne was cursing and shouting furiously as he ran in pursuit of them. "You fool, you fool!" he cried at the cowering nurse. "You left those doors open!" He dashed into the nearest room, and I saw the dim shapes of three of the hawks fly out within a foot of his head.

Then all the lights suddenly went on again. I was staring down at old Welland. He had dropped back in his chair, and his mummy eyes were closed. Death was on his waxen features. At the same time screams came from the rooms adjoining

"They're dead! They're all dead! The lightning must have killed them!"

A panic-stricken nurse with a white face came running toward Coyne. He simply pushed her out of the way with his two hands. "Get those hawks!" he shouted. But they were already fluttering out of all the rooms that the nurse had inadvertently forgotten to lock, winging out into the corridor through the doors, which swung to and fro violently as the gale blew through the house.

They seemed to me no longer vicious, but eager to effect their escape. And at last one of them found the open door of Rita Ware's room, and the whole flock followed it inside, and through the open window into the night.

The fury of the storm was frightful. I could hear the patients in the buildings, screaming with terror, and the shouts and running footsteps of the attendants. Flashes of forked lightning alternated with peals of thunder, and all the while the rain came down like a deluge. The nurse had fallen in a faint in the corridor. One of the others was bending over her, attempting to revive her; the third was running out of one room into another. All three of them had evidently lost their heads.

But Coyne had darted into Rita Ware's room in pursuit of the birds. Now, as the last of

them winged its way outside, he lifted the girl from the floor, to which she had slipped, and, bending over her, looked into her face. A cry broke from his lips.

"Thank God they couldn't kill her, the devils!" he shouted exultantly. "She's alive, Dewey, she's alive!"

He looked up at me as I came through the doorway into the full blast of the gale. Coyne hadn't even thought of closing the window, and the water was still pouring in. I ran past Coyne, forced away the ripped screen that was hanging inside the room, and got the window down. I turned. The doctor was holding Rita Ware in his arms, as if she had been a statue.

"Look at her, Dewey!" said Coyne in a husky whisper.

I looked. I gasped. The face of the unconscious girl was, feature for feature, line for line, the same as the lovely face of the mummified princess, Amen-Ra!

5

COYNE PLACED HER back in the chair that she had occupied. "Hold her there, Dewey," he said, as footsteps came running along the corridor. "We've got to get her to Farrant's house as soon as possible. Don't stir! Just hold her so she won't slip down again."

He hurried out to meet the

attendants, closing the door behind him. There followed a few quick interchanges. I gathered that some of the patients had become violent with terror.

"No, no!" cried Coyne peremptorily. "Let Sellers attend to them. He knows what to do. Then let him come here and certify some deaths. I've got more pressing business."

While he spoke, I was staring into Rita Ware's white face, trying to convince myself that the resemblance was a chance one, and failing utterly. I knew now—knew for sure that there was some subtle connection between this girl and the princess, and that Coyne had meant to tell me about it. I knew that Nell's projected experiment had some reference to the connection. Dazed, bewildered, I held the unconscious girl, and heard the footsteps of the attendants and nurses die away along the corridor.

Then Coyne was back in the room. "Well, Dewey, you've seen. You understand now," he said. "Dewey, I trust you. I've got to. And you've got to work with me, for Farrant's sake and the sake of us all. We've got to get rid of those cursed mummies. They are alive, Dewey."

"Alive?" I gasped.

"Do you think the Egyptians were fools? Those mummies have the brains and internal organs intact. It was only at a later period in Egyptian history that the

priests lost the clue and eviscerated their dead. Those mummies are alive, dried up, but capable of renewed life, just as many of the lower forms of life can be dried for months and brought back to life by being placed in a suitable medium. If only Farrant has kept those hellish hawks out of his place!"

"But what are the hawks? What is their connection with this business? Surely they're just hawks that have gone mad or something," I protested.

"I've no time to tell you now, Dewey, but you've probably guessed that Rita Ware is the reincarnation of the Princess Amen-Ra.

"Don't misunderstand me or follow a wrong trail of wild hypotheses. I *know* that the soul which forms the body of a human being, after assimilating its life experience, returns to try to make a better human being, guided by the lessons of the past. The trouble is that the soul of Amen-Ra has two bodies—two living bodies, Dewey, for its former habitation has not been destroyed.

"ONE OF THEM must die, either Rita Ware, or the mummy. And if it is Rita Ware who dies, we shall be confronted with the mummy of Amen-Ra, living on Earth, and capable of God knows what mischief."

"So that explains Miss Ware's mental state?" I asked.

"You've hit it, Dewey. The body was here, the soul was—but that again, I'll explain to you when I have time. I want you to promise to co-operate with me. I don't know precisely what experiment Farrant is projecting, but I fancy he has devised some way of bringing those mummies back to life.

"At the crucial moment, when the chance comes, I am going to try to put a spoke in his wheel, and destroy those devils, and—bring Rita Ware back to sane and normal life."

"You mean . . ."

"No soul can occupy two bodies simultaneously, Dewey. Now the immediate job before us is to get Miss Ware to Farrant's place. I've ordered my car brought round in front of the building. There it comes," he added, as the chug of the motor became audible beneath us. "Now let's get the poor girl into it.

"And pray, if you have faith, Dewey. The old, bestial Egyptian gods may have had no reality, but they did represent points of consciousness, so to speak; and in that sense they are a dreadful reality, the embodiment of those dark powers that are always waiting to seize upon some human mechanism in order to manifest themselves.

"Come, let us get Miss Ware out to the car," he added. "I have sent the nurses away, and

I want to leave before Sellers gets here."

We picked up the unconscious girl. I noticed that a strange change had come over her. Every muscle of her body, which had been limp before, had stiffened, so that she was like a person in a cataleptic trance. The flame of life was burning very low in her, if it was not extinct already. Her face had the waxen hue of death, and I could discern no signs of breathing.

Coyne's fingertips were on her pulse as we halted, holding her. "She's alive," he said, answering my thoughts. "She is alive because she is the reincarnation of Amen-Ra, and the thread of the new birth cannot be snapped. Those four old men were merely strangers whose souls were taken for the mummies."

"Souls—taken?" I cried.

"She is in no danger of death," he went on, without replying to me, "until the struggle between her body and the mummy body begins. Then we'll need to keep our heads and work together."

I shuddered. All the skepticism in me had been killed somehow, though nothing had happened that could not have been satisfactorily explained. Between us we carried Rita Ware downstairs. A small car was standing at the door, with the engine running, but there was no one in it. The uproar on the buildings had quieted down,

though a woman was shrieking at a lighted window, high up in the main structure.

But the storm still lashed the island with merciless severity. It seemed worse than ever. I could hear the breakers tearing frantically at the shingle on the ocean side, and, even as we left the building, a tall tree came crashing down somewhere.

IT WAS DIFFICULT getting Rita into the car. Her body refused to accommodate itself to our efforts in the least. It was necessary to prop her up on her feet in the rear compartment, as if she had been made of marble, and I was afraid of breaking one of her limbs.

"Don't be afraid," said Coyne, as he stepped into the driver's place. "It's the living woman against the mummy, with the odds in our favor, if things turn out as I expect and hope. Only remember, we're fighting primarily to restore Miss Ware to life and sanity, and then to save Neil Farrant."

"You don't know what his experiment consists of?" I shouted above the roaring of the wind.

"I do not, but I have gathered that he has some scheme for restoring the dead princess to life, together with her attendants. And against that we must fight, Dewey."

"We are dealing with a man who is, in certain states, a cunning madman, and it will require

all our ingenuity to learn his plans, and thwart him."

Another tree went crashing down. The raging wind seemed as if it would pick the car up bodily and hurl it from the road. The rain was still coming down in a torrential deluge. The sound of the crashing waves was terrific. Mud splashed our sides in torrents as Coyne slowly picked his way toward Farrant's house, through a morass.

We saw the lights in it; every room was illuminated. Suddenly Coyne jammed on the brakes. "God, look at that!" he exclaimed.

A corner of the roof had been ripped away by the gale, and the slates and some of the bricks of the fallen chimney littered the track. Two big trees had been blown down, and the headlights showed them immediately in our way. Coyne and I stepped out, and instantly the deluge wet us to the skin.

But high overhead I saw the flock of hawks wheeling. They were immediately above the gap where the roof had been.

"So they got in!" muttered Coyne. "That complicates things considerably for us, Dewey."

"Shall we carry Miss Ware in?" I asked.

He grasped my arm. "Don't you understand yet?" he cried. "It's her life against that infernal mummy's, that damned vampire's. The body of the princess must be reduced to ashes. That's what I've come for, and that's

what Farrant must not suspect."

We lifted Rita Ware out of the car and carried her toward the front door. I was afraid of the hellish birds, but they made no attempt to molest us. Round and round they circled, now floating upon the wind, now swooping with apparent aimlessness, till another current caught them and sent them winging upward again. And so, drenched through and through, we reached the front door.

COYNE RAPPED. No answer came. Somewhere inside the house we could hear Neil shouting incoherently. The doctor beat a thunderous tattoo with the old-fashioned iron knocker, and after an interval we heard Neil's footsteps within. He unbarred the door and stood staring at us in that uncomprehending way that I had noticed before. Then of a sudden he knew us.

"For God's sake hurry! We're drenched!" shouted Coyne.

He stood aside grudgingly, and we went in. He seemed to take no notice of the girl we were carrying.

"They got inside, the devils!" he shouted. "And they visited you first. I know! I'll show you! They got through the rip in the roof, and they've performed their part. The mummies are glad. They're having the time of their lives at the prospect of freedom. They're trying to get out of their caskets — Lord, I've been laugh-

ing. But they're obedient to my will!"

He laughed, clutched at the doctor's sleeve, and thrust his face into his.

"They'll have to wait a while, even the little princess. I'm not going to let them out until I've got my experiment under way."

We two were standing in the passage, holding the body of Miss Ware, which lay between us, stiff as a log of wood. Neil looked at it.

"What's this you're bringing me?" he asked.

"One of my patients," answered Coyne, assuming that masterful manner of his that quickly seemed to dominate the other. "I'm going to perform a little experiment of my own."

Neil looked into Rita Ware's face. "Hum, pretty girl!" he laughed. "Well, they're always welcome. Maybe the little princess will like her for an attendant when she gets out. She's used to attendants, you know, and we didn't have the luck to dig up any."

I was astounded that Neil seemed to detect no resemblance between Rita Ware and the princess, though the hall was flooded with light.

"Well, let's go in," said Neil. "It won't take long, though I guess it will seem longer than it is."

He led the way through the two rooms into the museum. The lights were on, not only in the

clusters overhead, but in brackets on the walls that had escaped my observation that afternoon. The room was flooded with light, but instantly my attention was riveted upon the five caskets that stood in a row against the rear wall.

From each of four of them there came a creaking, groaning sound, followed by a tapping, as of knuckles against wood!

Neil stepped toward them. "You're lively, old fellows, and I don't blame you after all this time," he said. "But you'll have to wait your turns. Why don't you take a lesson from the princess? See how nicely she's behaving!"

He looked at the fifth casket, which stood in its place at the end of the row, and, in contrast to the rest, was absolutely silent.

A faint and muffled groan broke from within one of the caskets. It chilled my blood. Neil kicked it, and there followed the same rhythmic tap-tapping that I had heard before.

Only the knuckles of a hand could have made that sound. I glanced at Coyne, and saw that he was almost as overcome as myself.

With a great effort I took another step toward the caskets and listened. There was no question but that the sounds came from within them. The outer lids were on them all, and there was no visible movement. And yet I knew, beyond all possibility of

doubt, that the hideous mummies were alive inside them. *And they were trying to get out!*

And all over the caskets I could see the footprints of the hawks, as if the obscene birds had been perching there!

6

FOR A MOMENT, I confess, I was overcome with horror. I staggered back against the wall. Neil Farrant roared with laughter.

"I tried to convey to you in my wire that you might expect queer experiences, Jim!" he shouted. "You tell him about the hawks, Doctor."

"Dewey, it's this way," said Coyne. "The hawk was a sacred bird in ancient Egyptian mythology. Mesti, the hawk-god, was venerated above all others, except Osiris and Horus. His special function was supposed to be to carry away the soul of the dead person, and bring it back when the cycle of mummification ended, and the dead were restored to life. Do you get me, Dewey?"

"You mean—those birds—carried the souls of those old men—into the bodies of these mummies?"

"Dewey, I'm not committing myself to a statement of my beliefs. I am simply telling you the myth, as Farrant asked me to," answered the doctor.

I think I shook my head. No.

it was too incredible that the hawks had transferred the souls of dying persons into those caskets. I was trying to retain my normal faculties. Yet all the while it went on, that rapping, creaking, groaning from within the caskets. Neil turned toward them.

"All right, all right," he cried. "I'll let you out. But don't be in such a hurry. Give a fellow a chance!"

He snatched up the chisel and began rapidly prying off one of the lids. He removed that of the inner case, and the pungent odor of aromatic spices at once began to fill the room again. And I cried out at what I saw. So did Coyne!

For the shapeless form of the mummy inside the case was moving within its linen wrappings. It was wriggling, undulating, like some larva, struggling against the bandages that held it.

I watched it, unable to believe the evidence of my eyes; and yet I knew they were not lying to me. The movements went on and on. At times the thing would fall into quiescence, as if exhausted by the efforts that it had made, and then the contortions would begin once more.

I was so sick with horror that many of the details of that scene escaped me. But I knew that Neil was prying off the lids of the caskets in quick succession, and that the stench of natron

had become almost unbearable. And within each casket there lay, not the quiet mummy that had been there for uncounted centuries, but a writhing larva that struggled desperately to free itself from the wrappings that enclosed it, while mewing sounds came from the dead lips.

Then, last of all, Neil lifted the lids from the mummy of the princess. Sick though I was, acutely, physically sick, I moved forward to see, impelled by curiosity that could not be suppressed.

Amen-Ra's eyes were wide open!

THE EYEBALLS were not shrunken. The iris was a deep brown, the pupils large and luminous. They were the eyes of one who saw. She saw! She was watching Neil's face, and the little smile about her lips had deepened.

The swathes of linen, which had been carelessly refolded, hung loosely about her. But she was not attempting, like the other mummies, to free herself from them; she was not stirring.

And she was not a mummy; she was a woman. The waxen look had disappeared from her skin, which had the flush of pulsating blood beneath it. The tissues beneath were those of a living person. It was a living face that I was looking at.

And it was the face of Rita Ware. There was not a particle

of difference between the two faces. They might have been twins, but they were not twins; they were the same person!

Coyne leaped to the farther end of the room, picked Rita up in his arms, and laid her down beside the casket. "Farrant," he cried, "look! For God's sake, look! Can't you see that these two are the same?"

Neil glanced carelessly at Rita. "The same? How do you mean, the same?" he asked carelessly. "There is a certain superficial resemblance, but that's all. What on Earth are you driving at, Doctor?"

He stepped back to the cabinet. I saw Amen-Ra's eyes moving, following him. The unconscious, living woman and the conscious dead one lay side-by-side; but it was the dead one that had the flush of health on the face, deepening every instant, and the living one who looked as white as death.

Neil had taken something out of the cabinet. It was a dish of obsidian, of a dull green, and deep, shaded almost like a flower vase. Into it, from a paper, he poured a quantity of grayish powder. He set it down on a table and looked at us triumphantly.

"The secret?" asked the doctor faintly. He was badly shaken, his self-possession had almost deserted him. For the moment it was Neil who dominated our little group of three.

"The secret!" shouted Neil, and, at his words, the mummies writhed again and rapped their bony fingers against the sides of their caskets, while I leaned against the wall, too overcome to be able to utter a word. On the face of the princess was a smile of triumph, as if she understood. Perhaps Neil had somehow managed to tell her during those conversations he had had with her when he was in his alternating personality.

"I'm going to let you in on the secret now! Quickly, because there's little time to lose. The secret is what I learned from the papyri, the secret that makes the wisest of the learned Egyptologists look like children—the reason why the Egyptians embalmed the bodies of their dead.

"They weren't fools, those old Egyptians who embalmed their bodies without removing the brain and viscera. They didn't believe that the soul would ever return to the same habitation; they knew what has only been rediscovered of late—that time is an illusion; that the so-called future life and this life exist simultaneously; that the every act of our physical bodies is simultaneously reproduced in the underworld by the Ba, the soul, and the Ka, the ethereal double.

"So long as the human organism remained intact, the soul would continue its active life in that underworld, until the cycle of reincarnation brought its ac-

*Illustration
by Sewell*



tivities to an end. Destroy the body, and the soul drowns helplessly for some three thousand years. Preserve the body, and the soul takes up the body's activities without a break or change.

"Do you think that the priests who slew Amen-Ra and her councilors escaped their vengeance when they themselves died? I tell you the drama has been going on and on, and we are to be the privileged spectators of it."

"How do you mean?" asked Coyne. He had recovered his poise to some extent, and was watching Neil closely.

"This incense," answered Neil, "which I got from the tomb, hermetically sealed in a phial of glass, is the fabled drug of immortality, known to the Egyptians alone of antiquity, though the Cretans had rumors of its existence. Its fumes act upon the human organism in somewhat the same way as hashish, but in-



finitely more strongly. They destroy the time illusion.

"So long as it burns, we three shall be liberated from the bondage of time. We shall live in the Ba, while our inert bodies remain here. We shall be transported to ancient Egypt, because that is the idea that dominates our thoughts. We shall be spec-

tators of the continuance of that drama that began over three thousand years ago!"

IT WAS INCREDIBLE that the mummies could have understood, and yet that knuckle rapping began again. I saw one of them, with a mighty effort, half raise itself in its casket.

"I tell you to lie down, old fellow!" yelled Neil, turning toward it. "Your time's coming. A grand time, old boy! You've been living it all these years, but you don't remember, now that you've been brought back to the flesh. Be patient!"

Neil struck a match and applied it to the powder in the bottom of the vase. Slowly a dark stain of combustion began to spread over it. Then the powder caught fire with a sudden tiny flare, and a thin wreath of smoke, with a pungent, sickly stench, began to diffuse itself through the room, quickly drowning the smell of the natron.

The powder flared up, exploding in tiny spurts. The stench grew thicker, stifling. I was aware of a strange feeling in my head. And in a queer way the room seemed to be growing dim, enlarging into a vista of long, shadowy halls.

"Now's your time, old boys!" Neil shouted. He snatched up a pair of scissors, and, stooping over the mummy at the end of the row, began quickly cutting the linen bandages. I heard grunts of satisfaction coming from the thing within. The linen folds fell back; the mummy sat up in its casket, struggling to free its lower limbs.

It was a man, about seventy years of age, his long, white hair plastered about the gaunt, skeleton face, his eyes rolling as they seemed to take in the surround-

ings. A skeleton clothed with skin; yet, as I looked, I seemed to see the tissues forming, the prominent bones receding.

And Neil was speaking to the monster in a strange, hissing tongue, as if explaining, while the mummy sat like a man in a bath, eyes alight with intelligence, fixed upon his.

One by one, Neil was releasing the mummies from their shrouds. Out of the caskets popped heads, faces, and shoulders of old men, of dead men returning to life.

And everything was growing misty as a dream; I seemed to see Neil, Coyne, and the mummies from far away, or as one looks at a picture-book. I was no longer completely conscious of my own identity, and the fumes of the burning powder, which was still exploding in little spurts, were choking me.

FOUR BROWN, gaunt, emaciated men were sitting up in their caskets, new-born corpses, flesh and blood instead of desiccated skeletons. I saw their arms upraised, I heard their gibbers rising into shrieks.

Then, at the touch of Neil's shears, the princess rose. She took off her shroud. Wrapped in some material of white, silken sheen, that looked as if she had just put it on for the first time, she stepped lightly out of her casket, a living woman of exquisite beauty. Apparently un-

conscious of the presence of Rita Ware, she stood beside her, her very double. She turned toward Neil, she extended her arms toward him.

Two words in an unknown tongue came from her lips, and on her face was a smile of utter happiness.

Neil dropped the shears; he turned to her, he caught her in his arms. Their lips met. I knew he had forgotten everything but her.

I couldn't stir, but hazily I was aware that Coyne was catching at my arm.

"Dewey, this is the time!" he cried. "We must save Miss Ware and end this witchcraft. I'm going to kill her. But first. . ."

I saw him extend his hand toward the dish of incense — but with infinite slowness and uncertainty, like a palsied man; and I knew that the numbing influence of the smoke had him in its power, like myself.

"God, I can't see!" he cried, and his arm dropped to his side.

Of one thing more I was aware. With a sudden bound, the mummy in the coffin at the farther end had leaped to its feet. For an instant it stood swaying in the room, an old man wearing a robe of frayed and faded linen, and a long girdle that dropped almost to his feet. Shrieks of what sounded like invective poured from his lips as he stood there with

extended arms, and his head rolled and lolled grotesquely upon the neck.

Then, with a sudden bound he had reached the door, which was partly open. He collided with it, seemed to understand its usage, swung it open, and rushed, shrieking and gibbering along the hall.

Or was it Coyne? The mummy had looked like Coyne — like the doctor, thirty years later. But this was the stupefying effect of the burning incense. I could no longer think rationally. The figures of Neil and the princess, locked in each other's arms, were becoming tenuous as those of phantoms.

In its flight, the mummy had collided with one of the Egyptian chairs that were set against the wall. With infinite slowness I saw this begin to slip toward the floor. That was the last thing I knew. Utter blackness encompassed me.

7

I WAS MYSELF, and yet for a moment I felt a sense of bewilderment. I was pacing a flagged courtyard, with huge, cyclopean pillars on either side of it. The sun was setting, a huge, red ball, across the desert in front of me. Nearer at hand was a broad and stately river, with sloops, with lateen sails of white, amber, and buff, drawn up on either shore.

The courtyard that I paced was in front of an immense building, composed of enormous blocks of masonry, with sculptured images of the gods, of colossal size, on all sides of it. Within this building I could hear the sound of voices, which seemed to come from every part of it, and blended into a not unpleasant hum. Lights shone through apertures here and there, and the part immediately before me was brilliantly illuminated.

I was myself — I knew myself. Had I not been, for nearly six years, one of the trusted bodyguard of the Princess Amen-Ra, of Egypt? Was I not the son of a small nobleman of the country, with a score of slaves, and broad acres on both sides of the sacred Nile, chosen for my position because my family had been loyal to the ruling dynasty for generations?

I knew all this as I knew anything, and yet there was a vague confusion in my mind, as if I had been dreaming. There was a curious odor in my nostrils. I had just come on duty after witnessing the embalming of a distant relative of mine, an old man who had held high honor at court.

It was the odor of the natron and spices that had affected my head, I thought, as I paced the flags, my sword swinging at my side, my sandaled feet clacking monotonously on the

stones. For three hours by the water clock that dripped in the courtyard I must remain on guard, since the Princess Amen-Ra was protected by her nobles, and not by the common rabble of soldiers.

Bitter and envious thoughts were stirring in my heart. This was the night on which her nuptials were to be celebrated with Menes, of Thebes, a noble who could claim no longer descent than my own, since we were both descended from the gods. She had fallen in love with him, and had sworn the Great Oath by Horus, which binds lovers together for three successive incarnations.

All Egypt was in ferment, for Amen-Ra claimed Osiris as her ancestor, and the marriage would surely end the golden age of peace that had descended on the land, when war had been forgotten, and the ships brought back riches by peaceful trading with the Cretans, the Hittites, and the Atlanteans.

And I had loved the Princess Amen-Ra since first I had set eyes upon her, a lovely child, six years before. This upstart, Menes, had supplanted me, and the thought of the marriage was intolerable to me.

THE SUN HAD dipped into the desert while I was meditating. The long shadows of the pillars were merged in a universal twilight. The figure of a

slave slipped past the water clock and bowed before me.

"Lord Seti," he said. "I come from the high priest, Khof. He awaits your pleasure."

"Tell him that I shall not fail him," I answered. "I shall be at his service at the appointed time."

The slave bowed again and vanished, I resumed my pacing. Presently another figure appeared between two of the pillars of the palace. It was that of a young girl, who came tripping toward me.

"Lord Seti, the princess asks your presence," she said to me.

"Who guards the courtyard if I leave my post?" I asked.

She laughed merrily. "The Exalted One has no fears, Lord Seti," she answered. "The mouthings of Khof, the high priest, are like the wind, that blows and stops, and then blows again from another direction. She has her faithful followers, others beside yourself. Does the Lord Seti question the commands of the Sun-Descended One?"

"No, I come with you," I answered her. She was one of the princess' attendants, high in her favor, and I knew she looked with favor upon me. Had not my heart been aflame with love of Amen-Ra, I might have been responsive, for our families had known each other for generations, our very lands on the Nile adjoined, and she was a beauti-

ful girl over whom many men had striven.

"It is not often, Lord Seti, that you come where I am," said the girl timidly. "But that is not to be wondered at, since the Princess Amen-Ra has bewitched you."

"What nonsense is this?" I answered roughly. "Have you no more sense than to chatter such things? Do you not know that if your words were overheard, dire would be your penalty?"

"Ah, Lord Seti," answered the girl, stopping and standing facing me in the twilight, "what care I? What is my life to me, when my love is not returned? Aye, I will speak now," she went on, her voice rising into an impassioned intonation. "I love thee, Seti, and thou hast known it for a long time, and thine infatuation for the princess is likely to involve thee in ruin."

"Now kill me with that long sword of thine," she added, making a gesture as if to bare her breast.

I was a little touched by the girl's devotion, in spite of the fires of jealousy that were burning within me. "Aye, you have spoken the truth, Liftha," I answered. "I love the princess. I have loved her since I first saw her. And who is this upstart, Menes, whom she has chosen to be her royal mate? Is his lineage longer than mine, is his

wealth greater? I tell you . . ."

"Hush — hush!" whispered the girl. "If those words were heard, you would be sent to the torturer. By Osiris I adjure you not to dream impossible things. Does not the princess rely upon you and your companions to protect her against the priests? Can a man be true to his trust and harbor such thoughts as those?"

I hesitated, and again that strange confusion came upon me. I seemed for a moment to be standing in a small room in some strange land, with the princess and Menes. But Menes was attired in strange, barbarian attire, and the high priest, Khof, stood beside me, one arm outstretched toward me. He was trying to tell me something; he was threatening to kill Amen-Ra, who stood locked in her lover's embrace. And he, too, wore the same barbarian clothes.

The vision faded. Decidedly it was the result of the fumes I had inhaled at the embalming that afternoon.

"Aye, you are right, Liftha," I rejoined, and accompanied the girl within the palace.

GUARDS, consisting of my companions, nobles like myself, paced the long corridors, their swords swinging at their sides. They saluted me as we passed, and I returned their salutations. Liftha led me through a long antechamber, in which six more

of the guards were posted. These men were sons of the highest nobles in the land, and yet, by favor of Amen-Ra, I had been privileged to command them.

A curtain of crimson linen hung before a doorway. From within it came the murmur of voices. The guard on duty called my name through the curtain. The benign voice of an old man answered, bidding me enter.

The curtain was raised, and I passed through alone, humbly bowing toward the dais on which Amen-Ra and Menes sat side-by-side. Seated on low stools in front of them were the four wise, ancient councilors of the realm, all men over seventy years of age, who had served the princess, and her brother before her, and their father and his father before that.

Amen-Ra and Menes were seated in chairs, and before them was a plain board on which was bread and salt, goblets, and a flagon of Nile water. The marriage had just been performed by one of the lesser priests, who had braved the wrath of Khof in doing so, and the royal lovers were about to bind it partaking of the ceremonial meal.

I bowed, and then stood up. I dared not look at the princess, but I fixed my eyes upon Menes, seated beside her like a king — Menes, who had supplanted me.

Had he had wit, he must have read my mind.

But all his mind was wrapped up in the princess. The two had eyes for none except each other, and it was not until I had approached the circle of wise councilors, bowing repeatedly, in accordance with ceremonial etiquette, that Amen-Ra looked away from Menes and saw me.

She signaled me to approach her, and I kneeled before the dais.

"My Lord Seti," she said. "I have sent for you because you are my friend, and I trust you as I trust no one, except my husband and these wise councilors of mine."

Of a sudden the rage in my heart gave place to coldness. It had almost been in my mind to rush upon Menes with my sword, and slay him. Had the High Priest Khof known that such an easy chance would come to me, he assuredly would not have laid the elaborate plans that had been staged.

I LOOKED AT Amen-Ra, and the love in my heart turned to pitiless coldness. There had been a time, while she was approaching womanhood, when I could have wooed her successfully. I knew that, and I knew that she had given me more than a passing thought before Menes appeared on the scene.

There he sat, the upstart arrayed in purple linen, at the

side of Amen-Ra, regarding me with the haughty composure of a king.

"Promise me that you and your companions will guard me well this night, and forever," said the princess. "And it is our plan to advance you to a post of the highest dignity."

"You may be assured, Bride of the Sun, that I shall fulfill my duty," I replied.

She smiled. "I knew you would, Lord Seti," she replied. "And yet my astrologer tells me that there is an evil star in my horoscope. Even now he is observing it. It is at the very point of transit across Aquarius — a new and unknown star whose appearance betokens dire peril. Not till it is beyond Aquarius' fringe may Menes and I partake of the ceremonial meal together."

She turned to the oldest of the wise men and nodded to him, and he motioned to me to approach him.

Have you news of Khof, Lord Seti?" he asked me.

"The high priest," I answered, "dares do nothing. Think you that he would lay violent hands upon one who is descended from Osiris?"

The princess heard me. "Ah, but I am all alone, except for my Lord Menes," she cried in sudden anxiety. "If the high priest excite rabble against me . . ."

"Then, Sun-Descended, they

shall die at the point of my sword, and those of my companions," I answered. "Fear not."

"It is well," she answered with new composure. "My fears are gone, Lord Seti."

SHE TURNED and smiled at Menes, and with that the last doubts in my heart vanished. At that moment the curtains behind the dais parted, and the and the astrologer entered. He was a man between sixty-five and seventy years of age, with scrutinizing blue eyes, and a deeply wrinkled face. He bowed low before Amen-Ra, his robes, stamped with images of the Sun-god and the Hawk-god, sweeping around him.

"The evil star — hath it passed Aquarius?" asked the princess breathlessly.

"Not yet," answered the astrologer, "but even now, it is upon the fringe of the constellation. Within an hour it should be clear of it, and then, Exalted One, it will be permissible to partake of the ceremonial meal, for the peril will be overcome."

"And if it pass not?"

"If it pass not, but continue in its parabolic course, within the attraction of Aquarius, there will be peril of floods, issuing from the dominance of the watery constellation, Exalted One."

"Floods — and what besides floods?" queried the princess.

"The position of the planet Mars indicates bloodshed. There may be civil commotions, even warfare."

"Aye," answered Amen-Ra, a touch of bitterness in her tones, "but why deceive me with half truths? Have I so many who are willing to speak the truth to me that you must needs prevaricate? What are the omens for myself and my lord Menes?"

"If, in its parabolic course, the evil star sweep within twenty-five degrees of Mars — and Jupiter, the benign guardian, be not yet arisen — there will be dangers other than those," said the astrologer reluctantly.

"Dangers?" queried the princess. She sprang to her feet. "Speak the whole truth to me!" she cried. "I adjure you, in the name of Osiris, Isis, and the child Horus, of the holy trinity whose names may not be taken in vain."

"There will be death," the astrologer whispered, and flung himself upon his face before her.

8

I PACED BETWEEN the statues of the gods. I glanced at the water clock. The water dripped steadily upon the flags, and the dial showed that a little more than an hour remained before my watch was ended. The palace was still ablaze with lights, but the voices within it

were hushed. Not a sound could be heard without, save the monotonous lapping of the little waves of the rising Nile against his banks.

It was as if all nature waited in suspense for the passing of the evil star. And I, with my heart hot with rage and hatred — what was I but a pawn, moved by the powers of the wandering orb that had swung into the sphere of Aquarius?

Yet, I pictured Amen-Ra, seated beside Menes at the board, with her wise councilors, waiting for the propitious hour to begin the repast, and my heart was touched. How lonely she was, she, the ruler of the greatest empire in the world! Again I thought of her words of faith in me, and I hesitated.

I looked up at Aquarius, swinging overhead. I could see the errant star, for, like all the Egyptian nobles, I had been taught astrology, and the influence of stars and planets upon human destinies. It was just clearing the edge of the constellation; but, a few degrees below it, Mars was rising, blood-red, into the dark sky. And I knew that already Mars held the wandering star in his embrace.

Stooping, I removed my sandals and strode noiselessly down to the waterfront. The princess' pleasure sloop, with sails of purple linen furled, swung at her anchor. I did not turn toward her, however, but toward a

smaller sloop, with sails of pure white linen. She was the swiftest vessel ever built, and she was mine. For three months skilled craftsmen had secretly labored on her, and I knew she could never be overtaken, given a start of a dozen drops from the water clock.

My chief slave, Kor, pacing the deck, stood rigid as a statue as he saw me approaching.

"Well? Is all in readiness?" I asked softly.

He moved toward me. "All is ready, my lord," he answered. "The anchor is held by no more than can be sheared away with one sweep on the ax, and the wind favors us."

"The supplies of food are below?"

"Aye, Lord Seti, sufficient to carry us to the land of Crete. All your commands have been obeyed."

"The two under-slaves are aboard?"

"They wait below, Lord Seti."

"It is well," I replied. "Serve me faithfully in this matter, Kor, and you become a freeman, once we touch the shores of Crete, where I am guaranteed refuge." And I turned away with a lighter heart. I had three followers among the royal guard, young nobles pledged to my service by the Oath of Horus, and, moreover, under indebtedness to me. It should not be difficult, in the confusion, to save Amen-Ra both from the guard

and from the priests of the crafty Khof.

I calculated that when the two forces met in battle, I and my three could easily carry the princess down to the sloop, and, once aboard her, we would have a clear passage down the Nile and across the Middle Ocean to the land of Crete.

I TURNED and made my way toward the huge Temple of Serapis, which was dwarfed in dimensions only by the palace. In front of it stood the gigantic statue of the god, the corn measure upon his head, the scepter in his hand, the dog and the serpent at his feet.

The huge temple seemed in utter darkness. Nothing appeared to be stirring, save that a mongrel jackal-dog fled snarling with a mouthful of food that he had seized from the ofal cast out daily by the priests. Yet, as I passed between two of the columns in front of the structure, a form leaped forward, dagger in hand, then recognized me, and fell into the same posture of stillness that my chief slave had shown.

It was the slave who had approached me an hour earlier in front of the palace.

"Greetings, my lord. The high priest, Khof, awaits you," said the man.

"Tell him I come," I replied; and the slave, bowing, moved away silent as a shadow.

I passed between the columns and entered the temple. The interior was so dark that only one who, like myself, had been initiated into its mysteries, could have found his way. Again a huge statue of Serapis confronted me, rising from floor to roof, the corn basket this time outstretched in the right hand, to receive the offerings of the votaries.

I passed along the aisle behind it. Now I saw the faint glimmer of a light behind the heavy curtains that veiled the entrance to the priests' room. I stopped before them for a moment. In that moment I again reviewed the plans that I had made, and I could find no flaw in them.

I had pledged my faith to Amen-Ra, and I was fulfilling it in my own way.

I raised the curtains and entered. The high priest, Khof, and a dozen of his attendant priests, were awaiting me. He sat at the head of a small table, resplendent in his priestly garments, in the light of the small lamp that burned before him. His long white beard flowed down to his breast. His attendants were younger men, clean-shaven, after our fashion, and I could see the glint of steel in their girdles.

I BOWED, and there was a moment's silence. Khof watched my face steadily. "You have

been tardy, Lord Seti," he said.

"Yes, Osiris-born. The princess deigned to send for me, to have me pledge my faith to her anew."

"You pledged it?" he asked quickly.

"Aye, but not by the secret vow by which I pledge myself to your service."

"Hath the sacred meal begun?"

"Not yet, lord. She and the accursed upstart still await the word from the astrologer. And, as I passed through the courtyard, I saw that the star was still within the influence of Aquarius, with Mars riding hard to catch him. There is no escape for them, Lord Khof."

"There is no escape," he answered. "For I, who have another lore than the stars, have read what is written in the lights of my breastplate."

He glowered at me so somberly that I felt a chill of fear run up my spine. I knew that the high priest was in possession of a lore that made the prophecies of the astrologers as a child's game — a lore brought to Egypt by a wise man from India, centuries before.

"What have you read, Lord Khof?" I asked.

"I have read death and treachery," he answered, "but death to who betrays. I have read of disasters, which, nevertheless, cannot be averted. So we must go on. Within how long

the destiny of the evil star be decided?"

"In less than an hour," I answered.

"Your men — can you pledge them?"

"Sufficient of them to ensure that the plan can be carried out," I replied.

"Go back, then, to your duty. At the appointed time you will admit us to the palace. And we rely mostly upon your valor, my lord Seti."

"Aye, but what of my reward?" I asked, to make him think that my motives were other than they were. "The reward you pledged yourself to give me?"

"A roomful of silver, and the highest post in the land, under me."

"It is well. You will not find me wanting," I answered. I glanced into the faces of the younger priests. These men were fanatics, who would stop at nothing, but old Khof, crafty and guileful, had schemes of his own. These men believed that they were fulfilling the wishes of the gods in murdering Menes, but Khof knew that the gods themselves are only aspects of the One and Indivisible. It was statecraft and not fanatacism that guided him.

I bowed myself out and made my way back to my post in the courtyard before the palace. I resumed my sandals; only their monotonous click-clack broke the

stillness. It was eery, that utter silence within, the thought of the princess and Menes awaiting the passing of the evil star.

And it would never pass. I looked up and saw that the star and Mars were within a few degrees of each other.

A SHADOW GLIDED across the court toward me. It was the girl, Liftha. She came up to me and stood with hands crossed upon her breast, looking up into my face pleadingly.

"Well, what do you want now? Another summons from the Sunborn?" I asked roughly.

"Not so, Lord Seti. But there is evil news from within the palace."

"How so?" I asked.

"The evil star passes not. The ceremonial meal is delayed. I love thee."

I laughed. "Is that part of the evil news?" I inquired of her.

She laid her hand upon my arm. "Harken, Lord Seti. Play not with me. I am a child no longer. Pledge thyself to take me for thy bride as soon as the issue of these affairs is settled, or I cannot live. Speak the truth to me, and put me off no longer."

I looked at her, pleading with me there, and a sudden fury shook me. "Spoke I ever words of love to you, Liftha?"

"Never, Lord Seti, and yet love hangs not upon words, but

has glances for speech, and, moreover, an unknown tongue that depends not upon the lips. It is my fate that I would know once for all."

"Know it then," I returned. "I do not love you. I love none save Amen-Ra, and never shall. Seek some young noble among her bodyguard and forget me."

"That is thy decision?" she asked softly.

"Aye, by the trinity of Osiris, Isis, and the child, Horus," I responded, speaking the oath that may not be broken.

She made a swift gesture, raising her hand to her lips. It dropped, with the tinkle of a piece of metal. I seized her by the arm.

"What folly is this?" I cried.

"Tis nothing, Lord. Only a piece of meat set out for the jackals, filled with a potent poison. My life is ended. Be — happy — as you can. Perchance . . ."

She tottered and slipped to the stone flags. I tried to raise her, but already she was breathing her last. She died within a dozen drips of the water clock. That meat, shot through with a subtle poison known only to the priests, had been set out for the jackals that profaned the sanctuaries by stealing the votive offerings.

So the evil star had found its first victim. I looked up, and saw that the star and Mars

were now only a finger-breadth apart.

Then I was aware of shadows moving softly toward me among the columns, resolving themselves into the high priest and his attendants. All of them wore swords and daggers, and I could see by the bulge of their garments that they had mail beneath them.

"All is well?" asked Khof.

"All is well," I returned.

"Then lead the way," he responded.

I half drew my sword from its sheath and passed once again into the palace. The guards still paced the corridors, but the advent of the high priest merely brought them to the salute. It was only when the band was nearing the curtain of crimson that those of them who were pledged to me came quietly forward and arrayed themselves beside me.

I put out my hand and raised the crimson curtain. Nothing seemed to have changed since I had been there an hour before. The princess and Menes were still seated side-by-side before the board, with its untasted bread and Nile water, their councilors beneath them. Beside them stood the astrologer, his head bent upon his breast. He was saying something in a low voice, and on his face was despair.

At the raising of the curtain, Amen-Ra raised her head and

looked at me. Her eyes looked straight into mine, and in that moment I think she read my heart to its uttermost depths.

She looked at me, she half rose. "What means this intrusion, my Lord Seti?" she asked. "Have I sent for you, or have I — Ah!"

Her glance fell upon the high priest, and the body of attendants. Their swords were half out of their sheaths, and they were glaring at Menes with a fury that could not be suppressed. And what happened was so sudden that I could see it only in flashes of quick movement.

Amen-Ra turned to Menes, who had already risen to his feet, and was standing there unarmed beside her. She flung her arms around his neck. The four old councilors were struggling up with cries of alarm; the guards in the antechamber were starting forward in confusion. Khof, the high priest shouted, and, swords in hands, leaped forward.

9

"HALT, KHOF! Thou knowest the power reposed in me, which even thy spells are incapable of preventing?" shouted the oldest of the councilors, standing before the dais with uplifted hand. "Halt, I say, or by the gods Annbia and Mesti I shall shake down the Nile to

overflow. Again I say, halt! Thou knowest."

For a moment Khof and his attendants halted. Upon the dais I could see the lovers standing, their arms about each other. There was no fear in the looks of either, but deadly scorn in the eyes of the princess as she turned her gaze upon me.

"Traitor!" she cried in a clear voice. "Traitor to your trust! Come, do your worst, but you shall pay — aye, you shall pay, or the gods exist not!"

I had hesitated, too; but now the sight of Amen-Ra in the arms of my rival proved too much for me. I sprang toward the dais. I heard the old councilor chanting the formula, used only in cases of extremity, and confided only to the hereditary wielder of the chief power beneath the throne. I paid him no attention; I leaped at Menes. Amen-Ra flung herself before him in the effort to shield him. For an instant she baffled me. Then I saw my opening, and like a snake my sword darted in and pierced him through and through.

I tore the girl away, I raised the form of the dying man in my arms and hurled it into the midst of the struggling crowd.

Yells of triumph and derision greeted my deed. By now the hall was a melee of figures, the guards fighting furiously with the invaders, as they sought to

rescue Amen-Ra, and then later engaging them in battle with equal ferocity, while three or four, led by Khof himself, were cutting down the councilors. And my own three men, taking no part in the fight, were trying to work their way toward me as I stood, holding the princess, who had fainted.

The eldest of the councilors, who alone survived, though horribly slashed by the priests' swords, still stood upon his feet. He was still chanting the sacred formula. He ended, with a note of ecstasy on his lips, and I saw him fall under a terrific sweep of old Khof's sword.

And then, of a sudden, the whole palace rocked. I stumbled, and, still holding Amen-Ra in my arms, went rolling down among the dead and dying, who lay piled up together.

THE PALACE WAS shaken to its foundations. The old, dead gods, the earliest gods of the land, long sleeping, had been stirred by the magic formula known only to the old councilor. They were moving in their hidden tombs beneath the palace and the temples; and the palace and the temples were crashing down in ruins.

The mighty columns quivered, and bowed, and fell in shapeless heaps of stone, with reverberations as if the very heavens had fallen apart. The roof collapsed above my head; the

walls were riven, and the floor opened.

I felt a stunning blow upon the forehead. Everything grew black, the yells of the contending priests and guards died away. I was plunged into an abyss of blackness, silence, and unconsciousness.

Yet not for long. At this supreme moment, for which I had so long planned, I did not intend to let myself be cheated of my reward. And, with a mighty effort of will, I pulled myself up out of the depths.

All about me were huge stones fallen from the palace roof. I had escaped death by a miracle, for, by the light of the stars that shone through the opening above, I could see guards and priests lying in mangled heaps. I had escaped without even a broken limb.

Outside I heard the confused cries of a crowd, but within the palace nothing stirred or sounded. I staggered out of the hole made by the fall of a mighty stone, which had saved me. I made my way over the stones and bodies toward the dais.

And there I found her, Amen-Ra, alive, like myself, and tugging fiercely at a stone that lay across the body of my rival, Menes. And, as she tugged, she began whimpering little words and phrases of love, so that I stood and watched her, amazed at her devotion.

I spoke her name softly, but

she did not hear me. I took her by the hand. "He is dead," I said. "Come with me, Amen-Ra, and let us seek safety in flight together."

She fell back, she stared at me as if she did not know me. Then it was as if a film cleared from her eyes.

"Traitor!" she cried. "You live, and he lies dead, my lover! But know this: if the gods have suffered you to live, it is only that you may suffer such torments as would move even me to pity. The curse of Thoth, the curse of Horus, of Anubis, the jackal-headed, of hawk-headed Mesti, of great Osiris himself rest upon you forever!"

She was like a coiled snake, crouched, waiting to sting me, but I sneered triumphantly. What meant the names of the gods to me, who passed the Greater Initiation, and knew that they are all aspects of the single Unity?

"I loved you since I saw you," I replied. "Once you deigned to smile upon me, until this upstart came along. Is he of better birth than me? I love you, I say, and I speak to you no longer as servant to princess, but as man to woman, since your realm goes out in the darkness. Hark!" I added, as the cries of the mob grew louder. "Even now the peasants come to drag you from your throne!"

"I have a ship in readiness," I went on. "For three months

my slaves have labored on her. No vessel made by man can catch her. I have wealth enough aboard her to make you a princess in some other land that I shall conquer. Come with me, and let us forget all the past in our love!"

Still she stared at me, but now her eyes seemed to soften. I mistook that look of hers; I thought that I had touched her, that she was yielding. I leaped forward and caught her by the hand again.

"I will love you as no man has ever loved a woman!" I cried. "Is it not for love of you that I have destroyed the throne of ancient Egypt? I swear to you that I will carve you out another realm, even greater than this one. Come with me, Amen-Ra!"

HER SOLEMN WORDS broke in upon my frenzy; they held me as if spellbound. And there was no more hate in them. Rather they sounded like the chanting of some ancient sibyl.

"Lord Seti," she said to me, "all this was dimly foreshadowed to me by my astrologer. He could not know, since the advent of the evil star had not been predicted; nevertheless he revealed to me that some day the one I trusted most should betray me.

"Aye," she went on, "and that he, too, was a puppet of destiny, and bound to the wheel of fate.

And more, Lord Seti.

"For he showed me that some day, when the cycle of reincarnation has grown complete, it is through this man that Menes, my lover, and I shall meet again, because we pledged ourselves by the oath of Horus, which cannot be broken. It is your task some day to restore what you have broken.

"Meanwhile it is my wish to rejoin my lover in the shades where Osiris rules. And for you, Lord Seti, there is one chance of redemption. Take it, and the gods will pardon you. Refuse it, and eternal punishment shall be yours, punishment so terrible that even the gods will avert their faces in pity."

"What is this chance of redemption?" I whispered hoarsely.

She put her hands to her robe and drew out a curious dagger. It was two-bladed, with a double cutting edge, and fashioned in such a way that, with the thrust, the blades separated, producing a fearful double wound that must instantly prove fatal, if delivered in the body.

"Slay me, Lord Seti," whispered the princess, moving toward me. And I saw that her eyes were alight with the longing for death. "Thus only, said the astrologer, can destiny be appeased. Slay me!" I had taken the dagger from her hand. I hesitated. I knew full well that Amen-Ra could never be mine.

and yet to kill her was impossible.

"It is madness!" I cried.

"It is truth. It means eternal peace for my lover and me; and, for you, release from the terrible judgment that Osiris will surely mete out to you after you die, unless you do what I have said."

I hesitated, then thrust the dagger into my girdle. "Never!" I cried. "Think you that I have done what I have done in order to lose you? Let me but have you in this life, and I am willing to face even an eternity of suffering, knowing that even eternity comes to an end some time, and in the dim ages that are to come I shall be free once more!"

I SEIZED HER in my arms. She offered no resistance, and yet she did not faint. I bore her away. I must have gone insane with exultation. I remember shouting as I forced my way over the heaps of fallen stone, with the crushed bodies beneath. I tore at the masonry that blocked the entrance to the palace. I must have been dowered with superhuman power, for, clutching the princess to me, with my hands I hurled the great masses of fallen debris to one side and the other, stones that a strong man with his arms free could hardly have lifted. Then, holding the princess, I went staggering out into the darkness.

A prowling jackal cried, and

others took up the cry. Across the Nile, red flames were leaping up toward the black sky. I heard the yells of the looting mob, but I saw why they had not come near the palace. Palace and temple stood on a little slope of elevated ground, and between them and the river there stretched an expanse of water into which I went floundering, knee-deep, waist-deep.

Then, bearing up Amen-Ra, I swam fiercely to where the channel of the Nile had run, shouting the name of my chief slave, Kor. But there came no answer, and, in the darkness, it was impossible to discern where I was until I saw the tops of the timbers of the quays before me.

The Nile had already risen a dozen feet, and a great mass of water was whirling down, against which I battled with my whole strength. That waste of waters stretched away as far as I could see, red as blood in the distance, where it reflected the fires of the blazing city.

But my sloop, my pride, my hope, was no longer at her slip. Nor was the princess' sloop, with the purple sails. Nor any other. In a moment I understood. All who could escape had taken sail; Kor had betrayed me, and had himself sailed for Crete, with all my treasures aboard!

Treachery for treachery! I cried out in despair, and, gathering the limp body of Amen-Ra to me, I swam to where a plat-

form projected above the swirling waters. It was a wooden framework on which the watchman had been wont to stand to shout news of sloops or galleys approaching up or down stream. It had been high above the waters, but now it was a scant two feet above the surface, and it was only a matter of a little while before it would be totally submerged.

I DRAGGED AMEN-RA up with me and looked into her face. Her eyes were open, and she was watching me with a quiet little smile about the corners of her mouth. She looked like one who has passed through all the wrongs and outrages of life, and fears nothing any more.

"Now slay me, Lord Seti, that the will of the gods may be fulfilled," she said, "and that you may escape the penalties and tortures of the hells."

"Never!" I cried. A fierce exultation had taken possession of me. The love of life was rising in me; I would pursue Kor, my treacherous slave, to the land of Crete, and regain ship and treasures, I would carve out a new empire for Amen-Ra, or perchance regain for her the realm of Egypt.

By the pale light of the arisen moon I could see boats pushing across the swollen stream toward the palace. I heard the shouts of their occupants; they were slaves and peasants who,

having glutted their vengeance upon the city, were putting out to possess themselves of the fabled treasures of the Egyptian kings, which were supposed to lie in the crypts of both palace and temple.

I could hear the shouting of them, as I crouched on the platform, holding the limp body of Amen-Ra. Unseen behind the projecting timbers, I watched them approaching.

But then I was aware of another figure crouching at the end of the platform, where the shadows lay deepest. It came slowly toward me, and I recognized, first the water-draggled garments, and then the face of the old astrologer who had predicted the woes that had descended on us.

A fire of rage burned in me. I snatched the double-bladed dagger from my garments and held it aloft. I regarded the old man as the cause of all that had miscarried. I threatened his breast with the pointed blades.

He scrambled to his feet and came onward fearlessly. He stood before me, and some power seemed to hold me back from delivering the fatal stroke. He looked at Amen-Ra. "Slay her!" he whispered. "Slay her, that the will of the gods may be fulfilled. Only thus may she regain her lover in her next cycle of mortal life."

"Fool," I shouted, "think you

that I am willing to let her go, to lose her forever?"

He laid his hand upon my arm. "Lord Seti," he answered, "your course and hers are none other-wise than as the evil star that has swept within the scope of Mars. Soon they two part forever. So it is with you and her; in your next birth you will see her, and recognize that she is not yours. Your desire for her will pass. Slay her now, and so fulfil the gods' intentions, and the plans that were laid down before the creation of the world. Slay her, I say, and escape the punishment of the underworld, and restore her to Menes."

I heard the long howling of the jackals, driven out of the desert by the floods. I seemed to smell a pungent odor, choking, stifling me. A pit of darkness seemed to be opening before me. What devil's magic was this? The forms of Amen-Ra and the old astrologer were growing indistinct.

"Kill her!" he cried again.

I raised my arm irresolutely, but the darkness was already all about me, and I was choking in the fumes. I was falling down, down. . . . Something crashed. . . . Then my eyes were widen open, and I was in the room in Neil Farrant's house again.

10

ONE OF THE two Egyptian chairs, set against the wall, had

fallen to the floor. It was the crash of its impact that had awakened me from a dream already growing dim. And the gaunt, brown form of the escaping mummy was vanishing through the doorway.

And after it, staggering, reeling, and uttering shrill, birdlike cries, the other mummies ran. But not the princess Amen-Ra; I was holding her in my arms, and in one hand I held the pair of long, sharp-edged scissors with which Neil had cut the mummies' shrouds.

I was standing nearly knee-deep in water, which was pouring steadily into the room through the open door. Outside, the rain was still pelting down, the wind raged, the storm seemed to have reached an intensity greater than anything I had ever known. The roar of the surf was even louder than the wind.

"Stop them! Stop them!" I cried confusedly, as I saw the mummies disappear. I had not yet quite regained my normal consciousness — or, rather, it was still confused by the vanishing fragments of the dream.

The powder in the obsidian vase had burned itself out, but the pungent stench still filled the room. Neil Farrant was standing against the wall, apparently in a daze; close beside me was Coyne, and he, too, seemed to be trying to orientate himself.

"Kill her!" he cried. "Kill her!" And then I realized that it was

he who had thrust the scissors into my hand.

Kill her? The mummy? But this was a living woman whom I held in my arms, though she was wrapped in linen from the casket. Kill her? Her eyes sought Neil's and seemed unable to discern his face, for she was peering forward, as if she, too, had just come back from that infernal scene.

"Kill her! See! See!" shouted the doctor, pointing.

And then I saw the still, white form of Rita Ware upon the dais. Line for line, save for the whiter skin, the face was the duplicate of Amen-Ra's. And I remembered what Coyne had said to me, that one of the two must die.

At that moment the princess seemed to perceive Rita Ware for the first time. Suddenly, with frightful force, she disengaged herself from my arms and, snatching the scissors from my hand, she leaped at her.

It was Coyne who stopped her. The points scored red rips along his cheek. He seized the princess' hand and, with all his strength, just managed to prevent her from wreaking her hatred on the body of the living woman.

"Dewey! Dewey! The scissors! Get them! Kill her!" he cried.

THE STRUGGLE that ensued was the most awful part of the whole business. I realized

that Amen-Ra was no human being, but a corpse endowed with vampiric life, that the life of Rita Ware depended upon her destruction. No woman could have exercised the diabolical strength that she put forth; no, this was a thing animated by will without intelligence. Amen-Ra was the effigy of the princess of old time, and the real Amen-Ra was Rita Ware, lying as if dead upon the dais beside us.

Dimly I realized that if Amen-Ra succeeded in killing Rita Ware, we would have let loose a devil on Earth, and that Neil Farrant's sanity, his very soul depended upon the destruction of that vampire that had arisen from the casket.

"Menes! Menes!" she shrieked. And then some words in what must have been the old Egyptian tongue, though they awakened only faint memories within me, and I did not know their meaning.

But Neil heard; he awoke. He leaped toward us, no longer Neil, but again the long-dead Menes of Egypt, and in his mind, I had no doubt, he was again fighting the palace conspirators. No, fighting me. I believe he saw me as the traitor, Seti; he came leaping forward, while Coyne and I wrestled with Amen-Ra, to keep her from plunging the deadly scissors into Rita's heart.

"Hold her a moment!" I rasped at the doctor, and turned upon Neil. I had been a pretty good

boxer when I was a boy, and I dealt him a blow that dazed him and sent him staggering back against the wall.

Then I turned to Amen-Ra — just in time, for she had wrenched the scissors away and turned upon Rita. I caught her hand and bent it backward till I heard a bone in the wrist snap. She spat at me like a wildcat, and the nails of her left hand scored my face. And Neil was coming back to help her.

This time it was Coyne turned upon Neil. "Kill her! For God's sake, kill her!" he cried to me, and hurled himself at Neil — a frail old doctor against a man in the prime of life, with all his muscles and sinews toughened by the desert life, and a reserve of almost superhuman strength, such as comes to one who, in a trance, draws upon the hidden storehouse of his vitality. Coyne went down under a smashing blow that stretched him full length in the water that was now more than knee-deep upon the floor.

I could never fight Neil and the princess, but fate intervened. Neil, reaching forward in the swing that knocked Coyne to the floor, tripped over the fallen chair and lay prostrate. Again I wrestled with Amen-Ra. I had her by the broken wrist, but, even with the bone snapped, she was delivering frantic swings and lunges at Rita with the scissors. I flung my body in the wav-

The points caught in my coat — and then I succeeded in wresting the weapon out of the creature's hand.

"Menes! Menes!" she wailed, and that cry was like the echoing cry of one eternally lost.

Neil had picked himself up. He roared; he came on like a madman; and what happened next was, by the grace of God, a matter of a split second's advantage.

I had the shears. I swung at Neil with my left hand, and dealt him a stinging blow in the face that halted him. I turned upon Amen-Ra, and plunged the deadly weapon straight into her heart.

The shears pierced through her body so hard as I struck that my fist collided with her breast. Blood spouted, ceased. For a moment Amen-Ra stood upright, pinned by the steel; and then it was as if all the devilishness went out of her face.

She was the young girl, the beauteous maiden whom I had seen in the casket, whom I remembered dimly, as if in a dream, to have seen in Egypt. A smile of heavenly sweetness flickered about her mouth. And then, before my eyes, she was dissolving into dust.

The weapon eased itself from the crumbling form. No mummy this—nothing but a little heap of dust that flaked down upon the dais. Of Amen-Ra, as I had

seen her in the casket, no trace remained.

I CHOKED WITH the horror of it. I flung the scissors from me and turned to await Neil's mad onset. But Neil was standing against the wall, looking about him as if he had awakened from a dream, and Coyne was rising out of the water and coming toward me.

He gasped as he looked at the heap of dust, already covered by the oncoming stream. He ran to Rita Ware and raised her out of the water, which was lapping against her face. And I saw that her eyes were open, and she was staring confusedly about her.

Coyne carried her to a couch and laid her down. She was mumbling, still half conscious. Neil was muttering too. Coyne turned to me.

"Thank God, Dewey!" he cried. "I knew that I could trust you not to falter. That was not Amen-Ra; this girl is Amen-Ra, reborn. So long as that vampiric double of hers had lived, three souls would have remained in hell—her own, and Farrant's, and this girl's. Thank God the spell is ended!"

Neil Farrant came staggering toward us. "Where am I?" he muttered. "Where's all this water coming from? What happened? The experiment—it didn't work? I don't seem to—remember—but I dreamed. I dreamed I was that fellow Menes, and

you two were in the dream too." He began laughing hysterically, and then of a sudden his eyes fell upon Rita Ware. "Who is she?" he whispered hoarsely to the doctor.

"I'll tell you later, Farrant," answered Coyne. "We've got to get out of here. The water's rising steadily. We'd best get to the sanitarium while we can make it. If there's anything that's specially liable to be damaged, and we can carry it. . . ." He looked doubtfully about him.

"The mummies are gone!" Neil shouted. "What happened to them?"

"Washed out of their caskets," answered Coyne tersely. "You took them out, you know."

"Well, good luck to them," cried Neil in high-pitched tones. "I'm sick of them, Coyne. That magic formula was a fake, and I feel kind of—soured on them."

He pitched forward as he spoke, but Coyne caught him and steadied him. "Take it easy, Farrant," he said. "Think you can make it? Dewey, you help me get Miss Ware away."

"Where am I, Doctor?" asked Rita faintly, and her voice was so like that of Amen-Ra that for an instant the whole picture of the dream flashed back into my mind. "I thought — they'd sent me to — your sanitarium for a rest. This isn't the sanitarium, is it?"

"No, but we're going there," replied Coyne. His lip was bleed-

ing from Neil's blow; his clothes hung grotesquely about him, dripping water—as, indeed, did mine—and yet he was again the suave head of the institution whom I had met that night for the first time. "This gentleman and I are going to carry you," he added. "There's a high tide that has flooded us.

"No, don't try to walk. Make a seat with our hands, Dewey," he said. "You know the way?"

I assented, and together we raised the girl from the couch. The water was almost to our waists. Outside confused cries rose above the wind and the roaring of the waves. A streak of light shot into the sky.

"God, what's that?" shouted Coyne.

Neil stopped at the door. "Look out for the hawks!" he warned us.

"I guess the hawks won't trouble us any more," the doctor answered.

Neil opened the door, and a sudden, violent gust of wind almost tore it from its hinges. In an instant the room was filled with the blast, and the water came pouring in. Carrying Rita, it was as much as we could do to wade along the central rooms and again the front door. And as we reached it there came a violent hammering upon it.

Neil flung it open. We bent our faces to the blast. We struggled on by inches. A group of men were in a large boat at

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the entrance, two of them standing up with poles in their hands.

"Git in! Git in!" one of them shouted. "Didn't look for to see none of you folks alive. Why, it's you, Doctor! Don't you know your place is on fire? And them damn mummies is running wild all over the island!"

It was the ferryman, Old In-corrutable.

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Back Issues Of

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Order From Page 128

THERE WAS NO need to tell us that the sanitarium was on fire, for we could see the blaze through the trees. The whole building seemed to have caught, and to be doomed. We lifted Rita Ware into the boat and struggled in after her. Coyne looked crushed.

"Reckon your folks will be saved, doctor," said Old In-corrutable. "There's a half dozen of the boats round the place, doing their best. But I'll tell you to your face, we was coming to make an end of Mr. Farrant's mummies if that fire hadn't broke out. And we ain't going to have them things running wild over Pequod Island and scaring our womenfolks and kids."

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" answered the doctor testily. But Neil said nothing; he was bending over Rita Ware, and his face appeared transfigured.

The high tide had submerged the lower half of the island; breakers were crashing among the trees. The gale was still at its height, and even as we poled our way toward the sanitarium more trees came crashing down. But the rain was ceasing, and overhead there was a rent in the murky sky.

At the edge of the higher ground, on which the sanitarium stood, the boat grounded. We leaped out. Neil swung Rita in

his arms and carried her a little way.

"You stay here with Miss Ware, Farrant," said Coyne. "Come along, Dewey!"

Boats were moving all about the buildings, and I could see that the higher ground was black with figures. The fire seemed to be burning uncontrollably, in spite of the rain, and it was evidently only a matter of an hour or so before the entire group of structures would be gutted. Coyne ran, and I followed.

One of the attendants came rushing up, and recognized the doctor. "We've got them all out safe," he babbled, "except the—the. . ."

I knew what he meant. Coyne and I ran into the thick of the crowd, who were being shepherded by the hospital staff. The attendant, who had followed us, came panting up and pointed, still babbling incoherently.

On the roof of the small building that had housed Rita Ware, four wild, half-naked forms were gathered. They were chanting and gesticulating, their arms raised to the skies.

"We can't get them!" cried a man who had joined us. "What are they? I never saw them before."

The leaping flames made the scene as bright as day. The four upon the roof, heedless of the flames that encompassed them, were leaping and dancing, and

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Order From Page 128

Did You Miss These

Back Issues Of

MAGAZINE OF HORROR?

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Order From Page 128

In The Summer STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

Jules de Grandin in
THE GOOS OF
EAST AND WEST

the wild chant that came from their lips was faintly audible above the roar of the wind and the pounding of the breakers.

"God, it's the doctor!" someone yelled.

AND THEN I saw that the leader of the band was the duplicate of Coyne. Yes, Coyne in face and figure, save that he was robed in rags of linen. And I knew him; he was the astrologer of Amen-Ra's court. Back into my mind there flashed the forgotten dream, never to be effaced thereafter.

Coyne ran forward. "Nonsense!" he shouted. "I'm here! Don't you see me?"

"We've got to get them down, whoever they are," panted a little man, his face blackened with smoke, his hair scorched by the flames. "We've got all the rest out safely, but those four—I never saw them before."

"There's no chance, Sellers," answered Coyne. "It would be death to attempt it."

"But who are they? Where did they come from?" Sellers shouted.

"It's them damn mummies," yelled Old Incorruptible. "Let 'em die. We ain't going to have them frightening our women-folks and kids. Good riddance to them!"

A hoarse shout of approval came from the assembled fishermen. And all the while a wild, whirling dance went on, while

the flames roared about the four, until they stood silhouetted against a wall of leaping fire.

And suddenly the end came. There came a furious uprush of fire, the whole roof collapsed, sending up a sky-high pillar of flame. Into that fiery furnace dropped the four dead-living men. One instant they stood clear against the flames — the next there was nothing but a raging holocaust.

Coyne turned to me, his face white, his body quivering. "That's the end, Dewey," he said. He turned to Sellers. "Get our folks down to the village in the boats," he ordered. "We'll have our hands full tonight."

12

I MADE MY way back to where I had left Neil and Rita Ware. They were standing together in the same spot, and they seemed utterly absorbed in each other, so much so that neither saw me until I stood beside them.

"Well, everybody's safe," I said to Neil.

"That's good," he answered. "Jim, do you and Miss Ware know each other? She says she's met you somewhere. She thinks it was in Philadelphia."

"Well, it may have been in Philadelphia," I answered, though I had never been in that city.

Jim, listen. You're my friend.

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Back Issues Of

MAGAZINE OF HORROR?

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Order From Page 128

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by Edward D. Hoch

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Back Issues Of

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#16, Summer 1967: *Night and Silence*, Maurice Level; *Lazarus*, Leonid Andreyeff; *Mr. Octbur*, Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Dog That Laughed*, Charles Willard Diffin; *Ah, Sweet Youth*, Pauline Kappel Prilucik; *The Man Who Never Was*, R. A. Lafferty; *The Leaden Ring*, S. Baring-Gould; *The Monster of the Prophecy*, Clark Ashton Smith.

Order From Page 128

What I'm going to say to you will sound crazy, but I'm through with the mummies and Egyptology for all time. You see, we're going to be married just as soon as . . ."

"Can we trust your friend?" asked Rita Ware, looking at me with a strange expression. "I—I've been ill, you know. A—a sort of breakdown. But I'm well now, and if you're Neil's friend."

"I hope that I shall be the friend of both of you for life," I answered. "I'm happier than I've ever been to know that this has happened."

"I know it sounds crazy," said the girl. "But, you see, we—we recognized each other the instant that we met. I don't know whether we met in this life or in some other one, but we know beyond all doubting that we just—well, we just belong."

She turned to Neil again, and I saw that both of them had forgotten me; and that was how I wanted it to be. For I knew that the oath of Horus had brought those two souls together, three thousand years after their bodies had been sealed into their tombs. Neither water nor fire, nor my own treacherous sword had been able to sunder them.

I turned away and went back to help in the work of rescuing the inmates. And a dead weight was lifted from my heart.

Coming Next Issue

The huge gray wolf came directly at me, as if it were going to spring at my throat. But it stopped a dozen feet before me, crouching in the snow, watching me with alert and strange intelligence in its dreadful green eyes.

And the woman came even nearer, before she paused, standing with bare feet in the snow, and stared at me with terrible eyes like those of the wolf's — luminous and green and filled with an evil, alien will.

The face, ghastly-white, and fearfully red-stained as it was, was the face of Stella Jetton. But the eyes were not hers! . . .

Then she spoke. The voice had some little of its old, familiar ring. But there was a new, strange note in it. A note that bore the foreign, menacing mystery of the eyes and the leprous skin. A note that had a suggestion of the dismail, wailing ululation of the pack that had been following us.

"Yes, Stella Jetton," the dreadful voice said. "What are you called? Are you Clovis McLaurin? Did you receive a telegram?"

She did not know me, apparently. Even the wording of her sentence was a little strange, as if she were speaking a language with which she was not very familiar. The delightful, human girl I had known was fearfully changed: it was as if her body had been seized by some demoniac entity. . . .

"Yes, I'm Clovis McLaurin," I said, in a shaken voice. "I got Dad's telegram three days ago. Tell me what's wrong — why he worded the message as he did!"

"Nothing is wrong, my friend," this strange woman said. "We merely desired your assistance with certain experiments, of a great strangeness, which we are undertaking to perform. Your father now waits at the ranch, and I came to conduct you to him."

Something more than lycanthropy was behind the

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by Jack Williamson

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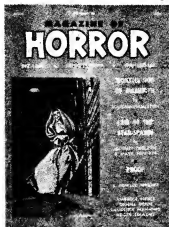
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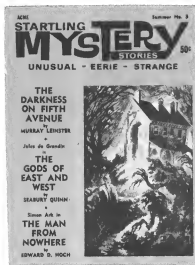
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